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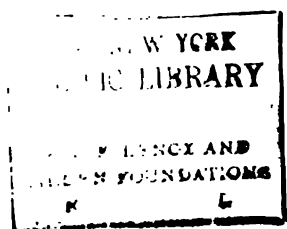
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"WILL YOU EXPLAIN ME THE WHY OF THAT, MR. GROWLY-GRU

From the drawing by Robert Edwards (See page





1. WITNESS STATEMENT



CHILDREN OF BANISHMENT

BY
FRANCIS WILLIAM SULLIVAN

"O children of banishment"

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

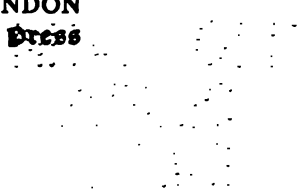
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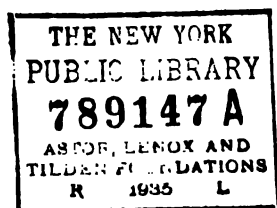
For publication in its permanent form, the author has revised the text and has added further material.

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1914





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BY
FRANCIS WILLIAM SULLIVAN

FRANCIS WILLIAM SULLIVAN
The Knickerbocker Press, New York



TO

H E R

**WHO THROUGH MANY MONTHS ENTERTAINED IN OUR HOME
WITH UNFALTERING ENTHUSIASM
ALLAN AND DICK AND ELOISE**



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CHILDREN OF BANISHMENT

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Children of Banishment

CHAPTER I

TRAILS MEET

DAN SILVER, the drive cook, and his assistants aboard the wanigan, cursed with a fervour that was almost prayer as their ungainly craft yawed and veered in the eddies of the freshet-strong river. A youth at each end, pike-pole armed, sought to keep the nose of the square scow pointed downstream. Silver himself at the ungainly sweep in the stern, seconded their efforts while he condemned the entire outfit in his charge, provisions, "van" supplies, lanterns, axes, and sundry. Well he might, for everything upon which fifty men depended lay before him in the belly of his craft.

"Whar ye figger to camp t'night?" shouted the youth with the rear pike-pole, relaxing his efforts for an instant in the endeavour to make himself heard.

"Back-set beach around the next bend, God will-in'!" wheezed Dan leaning against the arm of his sweep to wipe the sweat of responsibility from his brow.

Almost immediately there rose a wail of outraged protest from the cookee in front as the whole weight of the unrestrained wanigan pivoted on his slender

instrument. Silver, galvanised into action by the cry, strained frantically against his ponderous steering apparatus. The wanigan continued with supreme indifference to swing sidewise until she drifted grandly downstream broadside on.

At this juncture a great burst of Homeric laughter rang out above the tumult of the waters and the expletives of the cook. Silver, his face purple with exertion, glared furiously to shore where several huge men dressed in woollen shirts, "stagged" trousers, and high caulked boots leaned upon their peavies and roared to the heavens.

"Stay where ye are an' I'll run down an' git the 'Alligator' to turn ye roun'," bellowed one.

"Pole! ye sons of guns! Ye're on the rocks!" shouted another.

"Wow! She strikes! Jump for yer lives!"

"Hire a horse instead of jackasses!"

And then, as the stupid head of the scow completed the half-circle and pointed upstream: "No, no, Dan! The other way. Your compass is busted!"

Finally a shaggy-bearded man inquired:

"Who packed yer lard-tins for'ard an' yer pillers aft?"

At this reflection upon the distribution of weight in his craft the cook saw a light and turned with fury upon his nearest assistant. That guilty youth, nervously dropping his pike-pole overboard, an unpardonable sin, skipped forward howling just ahead of Silver's ready boot. The cookee forward, of different mettle, stepped in front of his defenceless comrade and presented the point of his weapon determinedly at his raging superior.

For an instant it seemed as if the stout cook,

shirt-sleeved and distinguished by a battered black derby hat, would hurl himself upon this defiance. But a glance ahead downstream seemed suddenly to bring him to his senses.

Less than two hundred yards away the river, narrow and swift, made a sharp bend to the right, and here at the water's edge the gnarled black arms of a wind-fallen tree thrust themselves up out of the flood, a real menace to the wanigan. A moment of indecision and Silver changed his front.

"Lively you fellers!" he snarled, leaping back to his sweep, "or the hull works'll go to hell."

His assistants, recognising a truce if not capitulation, regained their stations, one with a new pike-pole.

By this time the scow had swung round so that her head once more pointed downstream and the crew, taking advantage of this fortuitous circumstance, laboured madly to drive her out into the main current that swept safely round the nearing point. It was killing work and, despite the icy chill in the late May air, the men streamed with perspiration when at last the long fingers of the submerged tree scratched along the side and passed by.

"Ah!" sighed the cook in fluent cookese, "thank heaven that's over!" He wiped his forehead with his damp shirtsleeve and cleared his eyes. "Right there ahead on that beach—" he resumed only to stop abruptly as his eyes rested upon the spot, a dirty yellow crescent of sand laved by a languid back-set in the current. For a moment amazement held him speechless. Then—"Who the—what the—? Somebody's in my camp!" he bellowed at last, his unvented spleen rising.

The cookees ventured furtive glances. They, too,

saw the white A tent gleaming against the dark green of the second growth forest, the yellow flicker of the fire, and the thin column of blue smoke drifting off to the south-east. They observed also a man in woods-garb standing at the water's edge watching them intently.

"Swing her in out o' the current!" bawled Silver. "I'll see who's goin' to take my camps!"

With infinite pains the cumbersome scow was separated from the all too sportive swift water and directed into the little crescent of shelter. But not without accompanying developments. As she finally obeyed the persuasions of her guardians like an obstinate old lady with a will of her own, the bedeviled current gave her a twist and a slap behind that sent her twirling and uncontrollable towards the rapidly nearing beach.

And now the humiliation of grounding the heavy wanigan with her tons of equipment presented itself. Dan Silver knew that the tale of it would become a classic in all the north camp country. But another more potent reason urged him. The jam crew, heading the big Burchard & Hill drive, had no time to pry loose and launch his ridiculed flagship. Something must be done!

The revolving scow had already covered half the distance towards the beach, still drawn by snapping threads of current, when Silver discovered a black, water-soaked log wedged tight between two rocks ahead and to his right. He calculated the two necessary leaps ashore with his eye and then called for the stern mooring line. This one of the cookees brought and, coiling it, he poised on the edge of the sluggish wanigan and waited.

Along the banks, brave in fresh green, the silver birches patrolled the river. Behind them, the dank, cold depths of the forest rose gradually to the bald crest of a hill, beyond which, when mounted, could be seen other bristling hills melting into one another like the waves of the sea. Now, deep within the wood aisles rang the early bird songs, and there was in the air a faint scent of piny flavours yielded at the bidding of the warm sun. The river, brown and loud-voiced in freshet, shouted the cry of a million rills and submitted to the harness of man's will. For following the wanigan came a thumping, rippling tide of logs, cramming the river from shore to shore, and extending back as far as the eye could see, urgent, crowding, almost human in their importunity.

Of habitation or civilisation there was none; of human beings but the few that necessity or exigency had placed there—the uncouth, good-natured lumberjacks, the poised cook and his frightened assistants, the man in wilderness dress who stood immobile, watching.

At last, the moment having come, Silver, mooring rope in hand, leaped for the foothold he sought. But lack of practice in the lumberman's art and the fact that his boots were not "corked" proved his undoing. His feet shot out from under him on the slippery log and he rolled into the icy water, at this point only breast deep. A roar of laughter, explosive and genuine, rang out suddenly, and Silver, snarling with fury, looked up to see the stranger on the bank convulsed with mirth.

This was the last straw to the cook's already overburdened temper. Furious, he started wading ashore, the battered black derby still clamped tight

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o his head, his face congested. At the bank a shout recalled him to the necessity of still saving the wanigan. That torment had now surged forward parallel to him almost upon the far tip of the crescent and, with the idea of impeding her progress, he scrambled up the bank and attempted to snub the mooring line about a stump. But not quickly enough. He had taken but one turn when the rope tautened and, unable to hold the scow, he was dragged struggling along the shore. A second stump called upon ripped out of its bed of rotten leaf-mould, and only with the third did Silver secure turns enough to check the wanigan. She finally came to rest directly in front of the hilarious gentleman and his white A tent, and narrowly escaped crushing the end of his green-painted canoe.

The stranger was a big man, though not of unusual size. He was dressed in a brown and red mackinaw, blue flannel shirt, and corduroy trousers that disappeared into the tops of high-laced buckskin shoe-packs. On his head was a battered felt hat. Now, exhausted with mirth, he turned to where Dan Silver was making fast the mooring rope.

The cook, with a last savage tug, set sail for the stranger with no uncertain intention. The latter, observing the advance, sobered. He remained with his feet far apart and his arms akimbo just as he had stood while laughing—a posed but discomposed statue of mirth.

The cook, stocky, grey-haired, and purple-visaged, strode grinding through the sand and pebbles and squared himself in front of the stranger.

“What do you see so damned funny around here he demanded.

The stranger regarded him with an expression half of amusement and half of conciliation. Then he shrugged his shoulders and edged back. "Why, nothing much," he said with an uncertain laugh, "only it *was* funny the way you fell in the water."

"It was, eh?" Silver took a short step nearer, his great horny fists dangling by his thighs. "Pretty soft, ain't it, for you sports to come along here and laugh at men that have to work for a livin'. An' what are you doin' in my camp?" His voice rose truculently.

"How is this your camp?" argued the other stoutly, knowing himself within his rights. "This is free forest."

"You *think* it is! This place's been a Burchard & Hill drive camp for three years, and it's mine I tell ye!"

"Who are you, Burchard & Hill?" The tone was partly conciliatory, partly contemptuous. It acted like a goad.

"No, but by G—! I'm the cook, and you get out of this camp!" Silver advanced another step.

On the river the first lines of the great log drive rounded the bend, mumbling and fretting. In the midst of them, motionless and upright, leaning upon their peavies, rode half a dozen men, men whose swiftness of eye, hand, and brain controlled and directed the blind surging host. Nonchalant, perfectly balanced, at ease, these vikings of the wild viewed the incipient trouble on shore with huge delight and contributed unsought opinions and advice as they passed by. Their last shouts reached Silver faintly as, still leaning on their peavies, tall, statuesque, they swept around the point below.

And after them came the endless host of logs, bobbing, rubbing roughly against one another, muttering the swan-song of the forest.

"You've no right to drive me out of this camp." The stranger was all for peace now with the law on his side.

"Ye wun't go then, eh?" Silver's bloodshot eyes smouldered as the other's faint defiance stirred the bully in him.

"No. You've got no right——"

Smack! Smack! Both the cook's fists found their mark on the stranger's jaw and, barely able to hold his feet, the latter staggered back, crying out, his hands clapped to his face. Silver, surging with battle lust and eager to recompense his feelings for the disasters of the afternoon, closed in with a guttural snarl of triumph.

At that instant the flap of the A tent flew back and a woman stumbled out looking about her dazedly as if she had just awakened from sleep. A moment later, catching sight of the unequal combat, she cried out, startled, and ran swiftly forward.

Dan Silver, following up his attack, sent home one hard, swift blow, and his victim fell sprawling against a stump where he rolled over and lay motionless. Then the cook, true to the code of the lumberman, leaped for his man, his feet drawn up under him for the bone-breaking kick. He had not heard the woman, but now, in mid-air, a frail body collided with him from the side, throwing him off his balance and sending him clawing and scrambling in the dirt.

Simultaneously help appeared from another quarter. Leaping swiftly and surely from log to log, carrying his peavy as a balancing pole, a man approached,

zigzagging to shore across the log-carpeted surface of the river. A dozen steps and he sprang to land and threw his peavy to one side.

And now Silver, cursing savagely, scrambled up to front the woman who met him fearlessly with blazing eyes. The next instant steps sounded and the log-runner seized the cook by the collar and whirled him around.

"You dirty dog!" he said in a calm, hard voice, "what are you doing?" A pair of steel-grey eyes held the other unwaveringly.

"This man here took my camp and wouldn't get off——"

"*Your* camp!" The newcomer's hand, open-palmed and quick as light, struck the cook's leathery cheek with a sound like the crack of a pistol. Pale with fury Silver reeled for a moment. Then he gathered himself and leaped blindly to the attack. His opponent did not shift his position but waited the fraction of a second with narrowed lids. Then his fist shot out with the drive of a piston rod and caught the cook on the point of the chin. The fellow went down like a log and lay without the twitch of a muscle.

After noting the effect of his work for an instant the newcomer turned to the woman who, pale but unflinching, had stood quietly by during the swift retribution.

"Good day, ma'am," he said hesitatingly, removing his battered felt hat. "I'm mighty sorry this has happened, but I couldn't get here any sooner."

"Of course not. Thank you for coming when you did." Her voice was quiet and low. "Who is this man?" She pointed to the prostrate Silver.

"He's the cook of our drive, ma'am. I'm the river

boss; Bream is my name. Perhaps we'd better see if the other man is hurt. I'm mighty sorry this has happened."

Together they went to where the stranger still lay unconscious, face downward. In the struggle his hat had fallen off, and now a trickle of blood ran down his right cheek from a cut the stump had inflicted on his head.

"Oh, he's bleeding!" cried the woman fearfully, kneeling beside him. "He's badly hurt. Oh, Allan, Allan!"

"I'll get some water." Bream ran to the river's edge and using his hat as a scoop, returned with it brimming.

From somewhere about her the woman produced a handkerchief, and while he knelt beside her she bathed the pale cheek and the cut on the top of the head. Presently, handing her the hat, Bream turned and straightened the figure so that it lay flat on the ground. As he did so he saw that the man's lower jaw was twisted grotesquely to one side.

"Oh, what is it? What is the matter with his face?" she cried, displaying swift feminine emotion for the first time since Bream's arrival.

"I'm afraid his jaw's broken, ma'am. Let me see."

He knelt beside the motionless figure and worked the jaw-bone with his fingers. "Yes, it is. You'd better let me fix it before he comes to. Have you anything that will make a bandage?"

"Yes, in the tent. Wait." Once more she was cool and equal to the occasion. She disappeared and in a few moments returned with a strip of white cloth evidently torn from some garment. Bream straightened the broken bone, fitting the edges of the

fracture with a rough skill that the necessities of the woods had forced upon him. Then, while he held them in place, the woman passed the bandage firmly many times under the jaw and over the head, at the same time binding up the cut on the scalp.

"Now we'll throw some water in his face and bring him to," said Bream.

"You don't think his skull is fractured, do you?" she asked nervously.

"No, I don't think so. I saw him fall and the blow didn't look hard enough for that."

A few minutes of work and the man stirred and moaned, his hands instinctively seeking his face. Bream gently held them away until consciousness had returned and they had raised him to a sitting posture.

"Don't try and talk, my friend," he counselled. "Your jaw's broken and we've tied it up. We're going to try and get you to town as soon as we can."

"To town?" asked the woman quickly. "Is there a town near here? What town?"

"Hampton, where the big lumber mills are. That's where my drive is bound. It's only about thirty miles and there is a doctor there. Your—this gentleman ought to see a doctor."

"Pardon me if I have forgotten the amenities," she said, colouring faintly. "Our name is Mackenzie, Mr. and Mrs. Allan Mackenzie. If you will help me to pack up, Mr. Bream, I think I can make it to Hampton safely in the canoe." Her tone held no hint of doubt in her ability to accomplish the feat, and to Bream the statement was but a part with the grit and control she had displayed all through. Nevertheless, he looked at her with a flash of admiration,

feeling that sense of warmth that, in efficient men, is only aroused by efficiency.

"Oh, I hardly meant that," he smiled, "I wouldn't think of it for a moment. I'll see you down to Hampton myself."

"But your bossing—?" suggested Mrs. Mackenzie.

"Will take care of itself," he finished. "My foremen could drive logs through the Grand Cañon blindfolded and riding backwards. Now if you'll pardon me I'll run out and give a few orders. Start packing your duffle and I'll be back to help you as soon as I can. We'll have to portage half a mile before we can take the water."

Bream turned away briskly and almost stumbled over Dan Silver who had commenced to groan and stir as consciousness returned. The boss dragged him to the river's edge, dashed water in his face and shook him into his senses.

"Hustle and set your camp up," he ordered. "I'm going to Hampton ahead of the drive and if I hear anything more about you, you'll get twice what I gave you this afternoon."

"All right, boss," mumbled Silver and staggered away towards the wanigan.

Without a moment's loss of time Bream now ran out on the river, motioning towards him one of his men who was riding near the other shore. The two zigzagged together, leaping and bounding.

"Trot down to the head-end and tell the boys to hang the drive at Miller's dam till to-morrow morning," he ordered. "Silver got ugly again over his wanigan and mussed up a stranger in here. I'm taking him up to Hampton. He can make a lot of trouble if he wants to. Up to me to do what I can."

CHAPTER II

THE JOURNEY DOWN

THE start was made an hour later from a point below the long chute at Miller's dam. The green canoe, portaged by two stalwart lumberjacks, received the injured man, the duffle, the girl, and Bream from a low, flat rock, and without ceremony the river-boss pushed out.

Allan Mackenzie, suffering considerably, reclined between the thwarts upon the folded A tent, speechless, but groaning now and then as he sought vainly to ease his throbbing head. In the bow kneeled his wife, swinging her paddle with the force and skill of an expert.

As they made swift and silent progress with the hurrying current, Bream reflected on the sudden unsuspected direction his day's work had taken. Because a fool cook had lost his temper the finish of the drive must be intrusted to less efficient hands, the owners laid open to annoyance and perhaps expense, and himself converted into a guide for the strangers as well as a buffer between them and the firm.

This latter he did not resent so much but the former hurt his pride, putting him as it did in a class with the Indians and lazy lumberjacks who laboured with tourists through the fishing and hunting seasons.

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in her suit of soft, yellow buckram

The Journey Down

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realising blankly that it was six years since he had listened to cultivated speech or thought of the little amenities that go to prove the worth-whileness of civilisation. "Too bad he's hurt. I think we'd make friends."

They were travelling directly west now along a blinding path of red-gold that the sun, bloody through lavender mists, threw down before them. The trees glided by in stately unison on either side, dark and sinister-looking as they approached, warm, rosy, etched in clearest detail when they had passed. A lazily-flapping fish-hawk preceded them downstream, alighting now and then on the tip of some blasted pine; sparrows and blackbirds fought noisily in the treetops; occasionally a crested kingfisher fell like a plummet into the water and rose clutching his silvery prey and scattering showers of rosy pearl from his glistening wings.

Bream rested his paddle and pulled out his watch, a thick silver affair.

"Mr. Mackenzie," he said, "we can't make Hampton to-night. I'm sorry, but I don't dare risk the river. You see, another drive has gone in ahead of us and I'm afraid of submerged logs. However, we can go on for an hour longer if that is satisfactory."

The injured man nodded, unable to speak, and Bream looked at the girl who had turned.

"Perhaps you would like to knock off a while, Mrs. Mackenzie," he suggested. "I can manage the canoe easily in this current."

"If you don't mind I'd rather paddle," she said smiling. "I'm a very dissatisfied passenger."

He assented pleasantly and a moment later the steady, rhythmic swing of the paddles was resumed.

At last, when the sun had dropped below the pine-clad hills, they landed at a little sand beach on the up-river side of a point, and Bream found that his estimate of his companions had been correct. There was no hanging back on the girl's part with work to be done. She took hold almost before Bream had hauled up the canoe.

"You don't know how sorry I am that you've had to come with us," she said, as they made Mackenzie comfortable against the foot of a tree. "I can imagine your annoyance."

"Oh, the drive is all right now," he replied deprecatingly. "As a matter of fact I am rather glad to get in to Hampton early. I want to hear the saw-mills sing." They laughed. "And now, sir," he said to Mackenzie, "if there's anything I can do for you be sure to let me know. That's what I'm here for."

The other nodded gingerly, his large, black eyes studying Bream's face. Then he indicated his wife and took her hand as if to say: "Thanks, but she will do whatever I need."

Next Bream chopped and brought in a quantity of *chicos* or dry wood and left Mrs. Mackenzie to build the fire while he erected the A tent and cut his own bed of spruce boughs.

"My kind of people all right," he told himself with a wag of the head, "and they've just about concluded I'm theirs too, from the looks of things. At least the girl has. After all, I may not be such a barbarian as I feel."

When he had perfected the sleeping accommodations he returned to the fire to cook supper, but found Eloise before him and busy. No tourist peevishness

and laziness here, that was evident. He watched her for a few moments as she deftly mixed the flap-jacks. Then he quietly sliced the bacon, set the beans to boil in a saucepan, and arranged the stones for the coffee-pot. But his activities were not long-lived, for somehow she managed to relieve him of most of his duties.

"Really, I shall be spoiled if you do so much," he laughingly protested.

"You can watch the coffee and think how good everything is going to be," she said.

"That's a death sentence," he retorted. "I'm starving now."

She replied in kind and they maintained a cheerful conversation that fulfilled the conventional requirements of the occasion. Charmed by her friendly tact and courtesy he relaxed into the enjoyment of a social intercourse that was as delightful as it was novel. There seemed, on her part, the attitude of one who entertains a chance guest, and her perfect ease once more stirred in him long-sleeping pleasant memories.

Their conversation was not uninterrupted however, for Mackenzie was restless and nervous and laid a heavy tax of strength and effort upon the girl. This she met with unvarying sweetness and patience, despite Bream's discovery that the demands were less for physical necessities than for the mere presence of her near him, or her touch.

Sitting awkwardly against the tree-trunk, his eyes never ceased to follow her as she moved about, and he seemed only waiting for her to pass near him that he might take her hand. At times there was a look of wistfulness, almost of pleading, in his eyes that seemed

to Bream to express more than just a desire for sympathy for his injury.

Returning from one of her trips to Mackenzie's side she stopped and examined the blanket-covered pile of spruce boughs that Bream had built for himself to windward of the fire.

"Do you think you have blankets enough?" she asked.

"Indeed yes," he replied. "This is luxury after sleeping in wet clothes and bedding for a month."

"Your drive is long, then?"

"A hundred and ten miles, and we're at it regularly fourteen hours a day, most of the time in ice water. Being on the move it's almost impossible for us to dry things out. But that's the sort of thing that keeps us B. & H. river-hogs happy."

"B. & H.?" She knelt by the fire to test the flap-jacks.

"Yes, that's the firm I'm driving for, Burchard & Hill. Their camps are north in the Oseko district, and they use both this river and the Oseko to drive their logs."

"I've heard of them." She nodded slowly as she emptied into a tea basin some gruel she had contrived for her husband. "And I've been through that section. It's fine timber. What other firms are cutting up there?"

Bream coloured with pleasure at her intelligence concerning his work, and she at once took on a new value to him.

"No other firms are cutting on the Oseko that I know of," he said. "We've always had a pretty good thing of it. May I ask when it was you were in that country?"

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She paused reflectively. "Two or three years ago, it seems to me. I don't exactly remember. And now, Mr. Bream, if you will loosen Mr. Mackenzie's bandages I will try and feed him a little of this gruel. He must eat something!"

But when it came to the actual operation, the slight effort of swallowing even liquid food caused Mackenzie such pain that he finally motioned them to desist, and departed to the tent to try and get a little sleep.

Complete darkness had come when the two sat down on a wind-fallen log to make their own meal, granite dishes in hand, and with it had come the enveloping-chill of the North land. The chatter of the river tumbling over the stones had subsided into a murmur and the black trees clicked and rustled intermittently as the gusts of wind sighed through them. Overhead the sky appeared like polished cobalt, pricked here and there by twinkling diamond points of light.

Presently, as the girl encouraged him, Bream described more at length the perils, monotonies, and interests of his wild life, using as a background the Oseko region with which she appeared to be familiar. For more than half an hour, while Bream smoked and talked, she listened attentively, interjecting questions and comments now and then that betrayed more than a superficial knowledge of the subject. He was surprised at this and said so.

"Oh, you see, I have lived all my life in the North so I ought to know something about it," she said deprecatingly. Then she sprang up to clear away the supper things. Bream, sure of defeat should he protest that she leave the work to him, joined her unobtru-

sively and together they finished what little remained to be done.

When all was put away and Bream had pulled the tarpaulin over the duffle beneath the upturned canoe, he looked around just in time to catch her in the midst of a frankly sleepy yawn. He laughed and pulled out his watch.

"Mercy!" she cried, "what a thing to do! But it must be frightfully late."

"Half-past eight," he told her.

"That's midnight for me. And we must start early to-morrow, I expect."

"I think so," he said; "the sooner Mr. Mackenzie sees a doctor the better."

"Well, then, good-night, Mr. Bream. You have done us a great service by coming to-day. Thank you." She held out her hand frankly and smiled. He took it, small and warm, in one of his big, rough ones and with the other removed his hat.

"Good-night," he said, touched by the little formality.

She turned away and he stood bareheaded until she had disappeared behind the flap of the tent.

Then he replenished the fire and sat down before it, pipe in hand. The obligations of the day past, his mind turned to other things, matters whose consideration had been banished by the results of Silver's attack—the arrival of the drive at Hampton, the cutting out at the sorting and mill booms, the checking up at the office.

He outlined this work thoroughly in his mind and then looked forward beyond it to the short period of rest that intervened before the cutting again started in the forest. And doing so, his heart beat a

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little faster, for during that month he hoped to carry into action certain plans that had been ripening in his mind for the last six years. His last concern as he turned in was the hope that Mackenzie would not make trouble for Burchard & Hill.

Hampton is a typical lumbering town. It is divided in the middle by the East River, owing to the fact that the big saw-mills have occupied the advantageous points on either bank, and the workmen have settled accordingly. One thousand souls is the maximum of its population and these are housed in little weather-beaten, unsheathed, unpapered houses straggling along dusty, unpaved streets that end either in the forest or the river.

Of course there are the two or three pretentious red brick residences of mill owners that bulk large here and there amid their neighbours, and these, like the castle in the mediæval town, are a pride and moral support to Hampton. But the mills themselves are the *pièces de résistance* of the region. Huge, long, red, with tall iron funnels, and water barrels on the roofs, they stand at the neck where the river widens into Basque Lake and can be detected for ten miles in either direction by the plumes of thick, brown wood-smoke that flaunt above them. All day long the songs of the numerous saws blend in a weird metallic counterpoint, and, if the wind is from the west, the village is enveloped in a refreshing odour of sawdust and tanbark.

Alongside the mills are heavily timbered wharves upon which run the small rails of an unknown branch of an obscure railroad, a railroad which enriches itself

and the town by providing an outlet for the sawed product of the annual drives.

Hampton is a peaceful town and, in the summer, ravishing. From the edges of the lake that is as blue as heaven itself rise steep, wooded hills whose varicoloured foliage forms a mosaic in unimaginable greens against a constantly changing sky. The forest comes down to the very ends of the short streets, and the long howl of the winter wolves is not strange in the land. All day long the mellow clank of invisible cow-bells sounds from the wooded hillsides.

To this village came Bream and his companions about ten o'clock in the morning, having been on the trail since an hour after daylight. Paddling down the river which here ran with a sort of portly dignity in its broader channel, they passed the big sorting-booms of the mills. These were merely ponds, created by swinging out from the bank huge circles of logs chained end to end, within which the logs destined for the various mills were separated into consignments.

Now as the canoe passed, these booms were full of men leaping from log to log, riding with feet far apart like circus equestrians, using their peavies skilfully in the performance of herculean feats, shouting, chaffing, swearing, but accomplishing a stupendous amount of work. On the bank above them stood a short, stocky man, a bull-dog pipe clenched between his teeth, his brown derby pushed back on his small round head. His hands were clasped behind him and, in an absurd way, he resembled certain pictures of Napoleon.

"There's Molloy, the mill-boss," Bream told the others as the two men exchanged a wave of greeting.

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Eloise, who had stopped paddling, regarded the other with interest.

"I can feel his personality way out here, though I can't see his face," she said after a moment.

Bream chuckled. "Most of the men he's looking after have felt it at much closer range," he replied. "That's why he's the boss."

They landed at a low string-piece on the inner side of the pier and set out immediately to find the doctor. Mackenzie, whose condition had improved remarkably overnight, was almost in favour of foregoing medical attention, but this Bream would not consider. His faith in his own bone-setting had not matured so far.

Doctor Cavanaugh was found at home. He was a white-haired man with blue eyes and a hook nose, and had formerly been a famous practitioner in Toronto. Now, however, he lived in Hampton six months of the year for the sake of the fishing and hunting, and was an unfailing friend to the lumbermen in time of need. He had been in town less than a week when Bream brought Mackenzie to him. He looked over the work of the river-boss, grunting and nodding his head.

"Very good. You ought to be a doctor, Dick!" he said as he prepared an aseptic bandage. "I couldn't have done much better myself."

"Is the fracture set true, then?" asked the young man.

"Perfectly. The practice you woods fellows get enables you to do a surprisingly good job at times."

"We're not much at bone-setting," laughed Bream, "but we have plenty of cuts to look after. It's a

wonder some of our axemen don't chop their own heads off, they're so clumsy."

When all was done Cavanaugh put a hand on Mackenzie's shoulder and fixed him with his bright eagle eye. "Now, sir," he said, "you had better stay in Hampton for at least a week. I must be sure that everything is doing nicely before you start away, especially if you are taking the trail. A jaw is a very handy and valuable article and must be treated accordingly."

This edict put upon Bream the necessity for finding the Mackenzies a place to stay. First he interviewed Mother McCracken, whose house had been his home ever since his arrival in Hampton. But he found that, owing to the advent of an artist and his wife, the little cottage was full. He was directed, however, across town to a Mrs. Barry, the wife of an absent camp clerk, and convoyed his amused charges through the cow-infested streets, humorously pointing out fictitious places of interest to right and left.

Mrs. Barry proved to be a woman of some education who had sunk mentally beneath the burdens of her hard life in the lumber towns and camps. She was gaunt and hollow-eyed, but her house was clean, and she had a vacant room which she would have let for the sake of the company it brought had the prospective tenants refused her monetary demands.

When the Mackenzies had arranged to their satisfaction, Bream turned to the husband:

"I must hurry down to the mill and report," he said, "but I'll have a couple of the boys bring your duffle up to the house. And I'll look in on you this evening to see that everything is going all right."

He held out his hand and the other shook it warmly.



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Then he lifted his hat to Mrs. Mackenzie and strode away, the caulks of his heavy boots digging yellow pock-marks in the weather-beaten wooden sidewalk.

Mackenzie, watching the straight, stalwart figure recede, smiled cautiously, his heavy lids drooping half-way over his jet-black eyes, an action that gave his rather handsome face an unexpected calculating expression.

CHAPTER III

"DESCRIPTIONS"

BREAM proceeded immediately to the B. & H. mill where he was welcomed with a brief handshake by Molloy and profane shouts of greeting on the part of the lumberjacks. It was plain that as far as the rank and file of the industry went, Bream was not unpopular, a negative distinction vastly coveted and rarely attained. His reputation as a slave-driver, skilful lumberman, and invincible fighter was current through all the North country and had been won in many a crisis where quick thought and instant action had saved the day either for the owners, the men, or himself. And it was the fact of this executive ability that had raised him from swamper to jobber and river-boss in six years. Now, at twenty-eight, he commanded the hardest, wildest, most skilful drive gang in the B. & H. employ, and the supreme acknowledgment of a river-hog's skill was assignment to his camp.

The B. & H. office was a long, low, raftered room up one flight of stairs at the land end of the big mill. It consisted of two compartments, one larger, where the clerks sat on high stools against old-fashioned slanting desks, and one smaller where Hill, the "woods partner" of the firm, had his official being. To this Bream made his way, answering hearty salutations

as he clumped over the pock-marked floor of the main office.

A roaring command to enter followed his knock, and he pushed open the office door. Hill, a huge bearish man, almost concealed behind a heavy grey-shot black beard, leaned back in his swivel chair, his uncaulked boots on the desk before him. At sight of his visitor he held out a great, hairy hand which Bream shook, and ponderously removed his feet from their support.

“Well, what brings you in?” he growled ungraciously, kicking a near-by chair in the other’s direction. Bream captured it and sat down, accustomed from long experience to the uncouthness of the owner.

“Silver got in trouble with his wanigan and knocked up a stranger,” he announced succinctly. “Incidentally, the stranger had camped on our old number twelve camp-site and that seemed to hurt Silver more’n being laughed at. Anyway Dan broke his jaw, and I brought him and his wife down in their canoe to see Doc Cavanaugh.”

“Damn that cook! If it wa’n’t that the boys like his grub—” Hill’s heavy, brutal face was menacing. “Stranger an’ his wife, eh? Who are they?”

“Mackenzie is the name. Mr. and Mrs. Allan Mackenzie.”

“Mackenzie.” Hill mused a moment. “Never heard of ’em. Where are they from?”

“I don’t know.”

“Where were they headed when you found ’em?”

“I don’t know that either.”

“An’ you didn’t learn anything more on the trip down?”

“No.”

"Nice sociable party!"

Bream felt suddenly chagrined as he realised that he knew almost nothing of his companions. With an uncomfortable school-boy shame he recalled his detailed account of his own doings the night before. "I'm more of a barbarian than I thought," he told himself.

"How'd they take it?" inquired Hill, his question rising to a bellow. "Stranger ugly?"

"Don't know; he can't talk yet."

"Wife ugly?"

Bream grinned; "No, pretty."

Hill's eyes glistened momentarily. He smote his thigh mightily and roared a tremendous "Ha!"

"You coon dog, you!" he exploded, with ponderous innuendo and spat into the huge receptacle beside his desk.

Bream filled his pipe and lit it. "Drive ought to be down in about three days," he said. "Borwell and Dorlon will bring it in."

"How much you got?"

"About twenty million, but a lot of it's small."

"I figgered it would be. Worst timber in the hull tract, ain't it?"

"Yes. I'd hoped for a bigger drive. How did they do on the Oseko this year?"

"The two drives there come to about thirty-five million altogether. Them, with yours, makes the biggest year's business we ever done." He paused for a moment as if with satisfaction, only to add in a threatening growl: "but it ain't the biggest year's work we're a-goin' to do."

As his subordinate did not defy the assertion he got to his feet and commenced lumbering up and down

the little room, turning slowly at each end like a caged bear. For five minutes this continued. Then he suddenly turned upon the river-boss.

“Sight any cruisers in your section this winter or spring?” he demanded. (A cruiser or landlooker is one who is prospecting country for valuable timber.)

Bream ruminated for a moment, staring out of the window across the roofs of the little town.

“Well!” barked Hill, irritated at the hesitation. “Can’t you remember?”

Bream, annoyed in turn by this outburst, regarded his employer with steely grey eyes.

“Of course,” he said, coldly, “but I’m taking care not to forget. There was Joe Rainy and Jack Dufresne, but they had only been running their regular trap lines as they do every winter. Then, less than a month ago, there were two ‘sports’ with guides out for the early fishing. I don’t believe they were cruising—at least the boys couldn’t find any calipers in their duffle when they stopped at the camp for dinner. Outside of that, Mr. Hill, I don’t remember a stranger in the woods.”

There was silence as the older man, stopping in his tracks, studied his subordinate closely, rudely, almost suspiciously. Bream returned to his inspection of the village roofs through the distorting medium of the grimy window. Such interviews as this tried his patience and good-nature far more than the stubbornest jam on drive.

Apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, Hill turned away at last, tearing at a plug of black-strap tobacco with his yellow teeth and resuming his bear-like shamble. Again several minutes passed.

“Did you cruise that Abimoming district as I

ordered?" he demanded next, hulking across the floor to a huge, faded map on the opposite wall. Bream, marvelling anew at the gigantic size of the man, followed.

"Yes," he said, "I covered it pretty well last winter. It's a splendid piece of timber—promises even better than it seemed to when I found it last year."

He drew a grimy pencil from his pocket and indicated the position of the land in question. The map was drawn to a large scale and showed clearly the lay-out of the lumber country. Three rivers embraced it, the Oseko with its tributaries to the east; the East river in the middle; and the Abimoming on the west. On both sides and between the Oseko and East rivers, half-way up to the headwaters, lay the country that B. & H. had already cut or were cutting. North of this, and well up to the sources, was the timberland they controlled. Still north of this and a little to the west, across a Height of Land, was a sort of rough Y formed by the junction of two branches of the Abimoming. Within was the timber Bream had discovered the previous winter a year ago when, voluntarily, he had made a month's exploring trip by dog-sledge to further if possible the interests of his employers.

This tract he pointed out to Hill, interspersing his remarks with descriptions of the country, water-courses, and timber. The owner listened intently. When Bream had finished he lost himself in thought, occasionally rumbling in his great chest, his little glittering eyes veiled calculatingly.

"Them sections in the Y are the key to the hull country above it, ain't they?" he suddenly asked, striding once more to the map. And then, without

waiting for a reply: "Of course they are! The only way to haul logs to water from higher up is through them. Eh?"

"That is practically true," admitted the other, "but I believe it could be managed on the small upper streams in good years."

"Humph! Never!" sneered the owner, roused as always by opposition. "Cost too much." He took a double turn up and down the room. "By the way, what's your description of that good pine in the Y?"

Bream, who had been consulting a battered red leather note-book as he talked, ran slowly through the pages for a few moments. Then he read the "description" or location in terms of township, sections, and ranges south and west.

"H'm! Not so big as I thought. How much will it run?"

"All above eight inches will total in the neighbourhood of fifteen million feet if my cruising is of any account. I'm not a very practised estimator."

"Fifteen million feet!" Hill muttered the figures to himself, turning away to resume his pacing. For a space he was silent. Then he broke out with a bellow that was half exultation and half scornful laughter. "Only fifteen million feet, thirty thousand dollars and we could bottle up that country forever Amen! Oh! Ho! Ho! Thirty thousands dollars and God Almighty couldn't touch us!"

Quite involuntarily Bream shrugged although he made no reply. Hill spoke the truth. With the purchase of that single triangle of land went the control of thousands of acres of timber.

And Burchard & Hill were after it! Was there

anything they did not want? Bream's lips tightened lest he show his scorn even while he was forced to admire the grasping shrewdness of the intention. It would be a master-purchase of public land; a strategic *coup* that would make into fact the already current tradition that Oseko was synonymous with Burchard & Hill, the term in this case indicating a vague region rather than any localised territory.

Almost curiously Bream glanced up at the faded map and studied the inked outlines of the firm's possessions. Vast, prodigal in wealth, commanding both sides of two rivers, they extended farther north than any camps in that country—north almost to the south banks of the desired Y itself.

Finally the giant clumped back to his chair and sat down heavily, pulling now and then at his beard, scowling blackly, lost in thought.

"We've got to have that," he growled aloud, the air vibrating with his deep bass. "Burchard'll be here in a couple of weeks and I'll talk to him. I guess nobody'll hook the Y in that time." His mouth opened in a defiant grin and he cried "Ha!" scornfully. "It's practically all ours up there anyway. Every one admits it."

"Everyone but the Government," laughed Bream. "They're not very sentimental about free, open land, you know. They'll sell if they get a chance."

"They've been sentimental *so* long I guess they'll continue," growled the owner with finality, turning to his desk.

Bream, recognising his dismissal, picked up his hat and walked towards the door.

"I'm here if you want anything extra done," he volunteered, his hand on the knob.

“No,” said the other. “Take it easy for a couple of days; you’ll have it hard enough when your drive gets in. By the way, you might keep close to them strangers and find out what they’re aiming to do about the assault. I won’t back Silver up in this; it’s the third time he’s made trouble for us and he can take his own medicine.”

Bream went out and down the stairs into the sawdust street. Then he took his way directly to Mother McCracken’s, and mounted to the room on the second story that was always ready for him. It was neither a large nor a small room and just as its size was indefinite so was the whole atmosphere of it. One however felt that it was the lair of a man who clung to the memory of a home.

Against the front wall between the two small windows was a combination writing-desk and bookcase, its shelves well stocked with favourite volumes in faded bindings. The single iron bed took up the most of one wall, and a cheap chiffonier occupied a front corner where the light from the windows fell upon it, throwing out the several family photographs that leaned against the glass or had been fitted into the frame. Three chairs, one of them a comfortable patent rocker, comprised the remaining furniture, and against the wall, opposite the bed, a board, studded with nails and canopied with sleazy cotton curtains, furnished a place to hang his clothes.

Throwing on the floor his “turkey” or clothes-kit that he had brought down the river with him, Bream sank into the patent rocker and once more pulled out the discoloured red leather note-book. For fifteen minutes he turned the pages slowly, reading snatches here and there from the timber notes he had so care-

fully made. Finally he closed it meditatively and threw it on the bed.

"They want that timber—and so do I," he muttered thoughtfully.

Rising, he stepped to the desk, unlocked the single drawer beneath the writing extension and, after rummaging among a mass of papers, drew forth a flat, brown book stamped with the words "Sawpits National Bank," Sawpits being the larger town forty miles away at the opposite end of Basque Lake.

Seating himself at the desk he regarded the balance indicated within rummatively. It amounted to slightly over nineteen thousand dollars. Mentally he added to this the sum due him for the past eleven months' work, a matter of a thousand dollars, deducting the insignificant amount charged against him for equipment or "van" goods on the company's books.

"It'll buy two-thirds of the best timber in the tract and then I'll be without a cent to outfit and cut with," he meditated, shaking his head. . . . "But I can't wait any longer. Another month and there won't be a forty to be had in that whole country!"

Dick Bream had reached the parting of the ways, a parting that had loomed larger and larger with each succeeding spring. Six years before, the possessor of five thousand dollars in cash and an infinite capacity for work, he had come to this section to blaze his own trail. Born in St. Paul to comfortable circumstances, and the only child of a good family, he had been educated in the East and subsequently entered the office of his father's big lumber concern. There he had just commenced to make his way in the business when the crash came that changed the course of his life.

An unusually warm winter in the north country with its accompanying comparatively light fall of snow had resulted in the rivers failing to freshet in the spring. As a consequence all but a few small drives were abandoned, leaving thousands of dollars worth of timber to lie rotting in the forests a total loss. The Bream company's difficulties resulting from this misfortune had revealed his father's unsuspected financial weakness, and, with contracts unfulfilled, the firm had gone to the wall. After the settling up of its affairs there remained five thousand dollars, and upon his father's sudden death, this came to Dick Bream, his mother having died three years before.

The sudden tragedy of all this had unnerved Bream for the task of reconstruction that he saw before him to St. Paul, and, taking stock of his business resources, he concluded to lay the foundations of his own fortune on the practical basis of personal experience. With this idea, then, he pulled up by the roots all his former associations and relationships and struck north into the virgin Canadian lumber territory, arriving in Hampton just in time to go road-making at thirty-five dollars a month with the first of the Burchard & Hill camps. He had remained with this firm ever since, working up in time to his present position.

During one year and part of another, fortune had favoured him to the extent that B. & H., anxious to cut certain outlying stands of timber separate from their main camps, had given him the jobbing contracts, and from these he had made the chief additions to his untouched capital.

With this practical experience behind him and a fair amount of money in his hands, he felt that the time

was ripe to take the step he had contemplated ever since that momentous decision in St. Paul—to become a cutter and operator of his own timber.

His knowledge of the logging situation in the region was extensive and accurate—he had spared no effort to make it so—and he knew that, should Burchard & Hill take up that all-important Y on the Oseko, his six years of apprenticeship would go for naught so far as the present Province was concerned.

Now, as he stared at his balance in the brown leather book, the slenderness of his resources was brought home to him heavily, the more so since he was aware of the financial plenty needed to start a project of this nature. To buy the timber and hold it until he had earned enough to operate he knew would be the height of speculation owing to the risks from forest fires or wood-ravaging insects.

If he bought he must operate, and he knew that now or never must he buy. How, then, to raise the money?

Several methods presented themselves.

First he considered securing the timber by outright purchase, with the idea of holding it until he had interested capital in one of the large cities to the south. But this plan he abandoned at once when he realised that his negotiations would probably delay actual logging until the following year, in which case he would be forced to assume a burden of taxation he could not possibly carry.

Next he ran over in his mind a list of acquaintances from whom he might select a possible partner, good men all of them, experts in lumber, keen and resourceful, but without the capital that was the prime necessity. He passed them by regretfully but finally.

The third and most favourable method of accomplishing his purpose lay in purchasing the stumpage and floating a loan from the Sawpits National Bank with it as security. This was simple and feasible, but yet it presented elements that made Bream hesitate. In the first place it brought about no partnership, no communion of heart and head. He would be allied simply with money, a dead, cold thing, lacking brains, activity or resource. And these he felt he must have in another as well as himself. Appreciating fully the hazards of a maiden lumber venture, he realised the necessity of some influence to act as a check or spur upon him, should he lose his proper perspective in being too close to the business.

Furthermore, the bank, seeking its own interests first, would be no aid in time of trouble. Should any disastrous chain of circumstances occur, there would be a foreclosure and he would find himself penniless, once more at the foot of the ladder.

For an hour Bream sat lost in thought, consulting first the red book and then the brown one, lured by the irresistible opportunity, checked by the obstacles that presented themselves. He was roused at last by the voice of Mother McCracken announcing the midday meal.

He rose, shaking himself roughly like a dog. "I'll do it somehow!" he muttered grimly as he clumped downstairs.

CHAPTER IV

GYPSIES OF THE WILD

THERE are certain people between whom friendship is destined from the first. Such was the case with Bream and the Mackenzies. During the two days following his arrival in Hampton he spent much of his time with them and, as Allan Mackenzie gradually entered into the conversations, Bream found himself drawn by a personality as charming in its way as that of the wife. Mackenzie seemed to possess the mental characteristics of the Irish Celt rather than the Scotch, having a ready wit and a mind that leaped nimbly from one subject to another. His dark, handsome face, with its rather high cheek-bones, might have been rugged had it not been for the softening influence of his expressive black eyes and the almost feminine contour of his lips. His hands were long, slender, and restless.

Dr. Cavanaugh frequently made himself one of the party when not off at the trout-holes, for he was a man of considerable parts and enjoyed a variation from the limited social opportunities Hampton afforded. It was, in fact, his presence one evening at Mrs. Barry's that settled the matter of Mackenzie's vengeance against Dan Silver and the B. & H. Company. The four were sitting in the plain little cottage living-room lighted by its single oil lamp and were discussing drink,

the constantly live issue as well as the curse of any lumbering country.

"It's a fact that the doctor has the most palatial snake-room in the Province," declared Bream solemnly, but with twinkling eyes.

"Snake-room! Goodness, Doctor! What is it? A chamber of horrors?" Eloise clasped her hands upon her knees with a delicious shudder.

"For those that are in it, yes," replied Cavanaugh. "All the expeditions that ever sailed to Africa couldn't muster the quantity of puce elephants and plaid zebras that have been seen in that room."

"H'm! I see now," said Mackenzie, "kind of a padded cell for last staggers, eh?"

"Yes, more's the pity." The doctor was serious now. "I have a big, husky brute by the name of Marty at my place who trusses them up and watches them till they're fit to go on the street again. It's a sickening business though."

"Yes, but a good work," put in Bream. "You have no idea, Mrs. Mackenzie, how the doctor hopes and plans for us river-hogs—when the fish aren't biting. Easy there, Doctor! I'm serious. He is even trying to raise funds for a hospital—keep him off, won't some of you! He is about to dissect me for revealing his pet ambition."

"How about it, Doctor? Defend yourself."

"And it please your lordship, I plead guilty," laughed Cavanaugh, "though Dick has no business to expose me this way. The fact is we need a hospital badly here, not only to take care of the drinking element but as a place where injured lumberjacks can come—and there are scores of them every year. I've been working to raise money enough without

making an appeal to any church or organisation, and I think we'll get it eventually; but it seems to come slowly."

"Do the lumberjacks contribute?" It was Eloise's question.

"Not much. Poor devils, they can hardly make both ends meet even if they live straight."

"By Jove! I hadn't thought of it!" exclaimed Mackenzie irrelevantly, slapping his knee with one hand. "Look here," he went on to Bream, "you were asking me yesterday what action I was going to take against that man Silver, and I said I was going to send him to jail."

"Yes."

"Well, I've changed my mind."

"Good! The spirit of charity seems to be in the air!"

The little china clock on the lambrequin-covered pine mantelpiece ticked loudly in the instant's pause, and from outside came a long rush and roar as a belated wind swept through the near-by forest.

"How much would Silver's prospective jail sentence amount to in a fine?"

Bream thought a moment. "Considering that the attack was unprovoked, I should say about fifty dollars."

"Good. Now how is this? The trial can't come off for about six weeks, you tell me, and I may not want to spend that much time in Hampton. Besides, I don't want your man's money anyway. What I want is his punishment. Now if B. & H. will deduct fifty dollars from the cook's salary and present it to Dr. Cavanaugh for the hospital I'll call everything square."

For a moment there was silence. Then Cavanaugh spoke:

"See there, Dick," he reproached, "you've been begging for me and forced Mr. Mackenzie——"

"Not at all, Doctor, not at all!" Allan rose from the old horse-hair sofa in genuine protest and laid his hand on the physician's shoulder. "It's nothing *I'm* doing; Dan Silver's doing it. When the hospital's built he'll get his money's worth, I'll wager."

"He's had it already out of the snake-room," said Bream crisply, "and this is the least he should do. With all that, I think this is very handsome of Mr. Mackenzie."

"Oh, don't thank me!" cried Allan turning to look at his wife. "If Eloise approves I shall be satisfied. It's really such a little thing." His deprecation rang true yet Bream, watching him, discerned in his eyes that same look of uneasy wistfulness, almost pleading, that he had seen in them during the journey down. It was as if Mackenzie sued for appreciation like a child who has anticipated commands.

Eloise, dressed in a blue serge skirt and shirt-waist, sat in a creaky patent rocker by the red-shaded lamp. The light fell softly on her fair, broad brow and the mass of chestnut hair coiled above it. Her hazel eyes, tender, candid, sincere, were fixed gravely upon her husband, and her lips, red and enticingly full, were parted in a smile.

"I think it is a lovely thing to do, dear," she said, so gently, so lovingly, that Bream saw for a moment beneath the veil of her reserve, and glimpsed a depth of wifehood, the possibilities of which hurt him like a pain. His mind remained quiet, dazzled by its vision. "What I have forsworn!" he thought, "for the sake

of a miserable fortune!" Then his eyes returned to Mackenzie.

The man was radiant, and from that moment until the time when the visitors took their leave, he seemed like one stimulated by some invisible wine, like one whose cup of joy is full.

Next day three log drives reached Hampton; Bream's, Olson and Svenson's No. 3 from a tributary of the East River, and that of LeClerc, a jobber in a second growth pot-hole country. For miles upstream the river was a solid carpet of brown logs that diminished to the size of toothpicks in the perspective.

As the afternoon wore on the lumberjacks from the rear drives appeared in the distance, making for town along the bank trails on either shore. Dressed in their river togs with spots of bright colour here and there, they pressed on in single file, mingling their walk with rough horse-play, gigantic laughter, Rabelaisian humour. This was the hour of freedom, of anticipation, dreamed and talked of through many a day of bitter cold and exhausting labour. The drive was in. Reward was at hand.

The little town ahead of them, quiet, busy at its work, became invested with all the glamour of romance. It was the promised land, the land of milk and honey. In it were to be found light and colour and companionship, joy, adventure, indulgence, satiation.

By nightfall Hampton was full of men with money burning their pockets that moved in pairs or groups up one side of the main street and down the other. The conjunction of this road and "Paradise Alley" was at right angles, so that there was an L of constantly

seething activity as the men passed alternately from the lure of vice to the more seriously attractive luxuries of the brilliantly lighted shop windows.

And in the last moments of restraint queer twists of character manifested themselves. One man who had promised his wife a feather boa bought it immediately and tied it round his waist underneath his coat, determined that it, at least, should reach home safely whatever might happen thereafter to himself. Another, taking a faro dealer aside, thrust a hundred dollars into his hand saying: "If I ask for this tonight, Jimmy, don't give it to me noways, no matter what I do." And Jimmy promised, regretting sincerely that Bud wouldn't let the cards alone, but taking every cent of his roll six hours later without the flicker of an eyelash.

Bream, who had been busy at the mill all day with Dorlon and Borwell, his foremen, did not see his men until that evening as he was on his way to Mrs. Barry's. So that when he entered "Paradise Alley" a whoop of delight went up.

Bream's attitude towards the "Alley" and its supposed delights was that of one in whom a high valuation of himself was as inbred as fastidiousness in speech or thought. And yet it held no censure for those whose scheme of morals differed from his, for always he joined the festivities in their early stages, led his men to the bar, and joined them in a single drink.

This he had made a part of his policy in keeping the ascendancy over them. But there was no misunderstanding it for, though he clapped many a shoulder in thunderous greeting, he saw to it that his own shoulders always escaped.

To-night he found the gang in the Grand Empire, the riverman's ideal of gilded luxury, and, in the course of a half-hour of deafening comradeship, managed to pass the news of Dan Silver's enforced contribution to the hospital. As Dan's reputation was none of the best in that he invariably had another engagement when the time approached for him to stand out before his brethren and say: "Well, give it a name boys," this news produced pandemonium.

The surly cook, who had concealed his unwelcome charity at the time of paying off, was sought high and low. But he had disappeared, cut to the quick with anguish, tasting to the last drop the bitter dregs of another's revenge!

When Bream reached Mrs. Barry's it was but a little past eight and the glow of the crimson and grey twilight still lingered in the sky. Eloise, wrapped in a sweater and shawl, sat on the low verandah.

"*Please*, Mr. Bream, tell me what's happening to-night?" she said curiously, when the greetings were over.

"The boys have just begun to take this town apart, piece by piece," he replied. "All wise persons are indoors. Not five minutes ago I saw an estimable gentleman shaken by his heels while coins rained out of his pockets. He'll get them all back, of course, but he will realise that temptation is abroad."

"And Allan is out somewhere!" she said, with a note of concern. "Do you think anything will happen to him?"

Bream's face, which had grown instantly grave, relaxed. "No, I don't think so," he said. "I had forgotten for a moment that he still wears his bandages. He'll be safe. The boys aren't cruel; they're only

out for fun. And then besides—" he chuckled—"I think Mr. Mackenzie will be quite a hero. Anyone who can force Dan Silver into philanthropy will command instant respect." And he told her of his experience in the Grand Empire.

She laughed. "All the same, I shall be relieved when Allan comes in. When there is any excitement going on he is a regular boy. He likes to be out on election nights and go to fairs and see parades. He says it does him good to rub up against his fellow-man." She laughed again. "But I must confess I don't like crowds."

"Nor I," he concurred as they went inside to the living-room. When she was seated, he pulled a book from his pocket.

"Here is something I thought might help you pass the time while you are in Hampton," he said, handing it to her. "It's one of a dozen that I ordered from Toronto and that came in my absence."

"A book!" she cried, flushing with pleasure. "How lovely, Mr. Bream! And Kipling, too! You can't imagine how I shall enjoy it. It seems years since I have read anything!" She held the volume with caressing hands, examining the scarlet leather binding and opening it to pages here and there.

A flood of warmth surged over him.

"Well, I haven't much of a home," he said laughing, "but I try to keep up the illusion of one by getting some of the new books every six months. I hate to lose touch with everything civilised."

"A home!" she cried wistfully, letting the book fall in her lap while her eyes seemed to brood upon some inner vision. "Even your illusion of it can seem so wonderful to one who has not even that!"

"But surely, you have some place——"

He hesitated, despite the impulse that urged him on. His mental concept of her life had always pictured her as the chatelaine of some exquisite abode, her personality at its best amid surroundings of refinement and taste.

"Well, not really." She had changed on the instant. Her laugh was almost gay. "You see, Allan's business is so much a matter of circumstance that we cannot settle down anywhere for very long. That is the only reason I sometimes wish for a place I can call my own. But then, that isn't often. I love the moving about. I don't know what I should do if we left the trail forever."

He acquiesced in her mood. "Allan's business!" he cried scornfully, "I don't believe he has any. He just travels about in state at his pleasure, like the famous Sir George Simpson!"

"Oh, but no!" she cried, "Allan is always doing something. He is quite the despair of my life because he is a Jack-of-all-trades and master in several. It is the *Wanderlust* that keeps him on the move. As soon as he got his degrees in science from McGill he started forth, and as a result, has geologised and prospected and mined and farmed and traded pretty well over the whole of Canada. When we met you, for instance, we had been north all winter in the silver country assaying for a syndicate. And the spring and summer before that in Alberta, experimenting with soils to help the Doukhobor farmers. Ah, yes," she smiled and shrugged with an inexpressibly graceful movement, "we're sort of gypsies of the wild. But let's not talk about it any more. Think of the months of wilderness we have to the one night when we can

tear Kipling to tatters with impunity!" She took up the book again and ran hastily through it. "And speaking of Kipling, I can never see a Northwest Mounted Police barracks without thinking of Danny Deever; actually my blood runs cold."

"And I can never see a windy night on Basque Lake and the Company steamer plowing home through it that I don't think of the '*Bolivar*'—'trailing like a wounded duck, working out her soul'— That makes my blood run *warm!*"

They both laughed. Outside the wind roared spasmodically through the near-by forest and upon it, rising and falling with the gusts, sounded the din from "Paradise Alley," a murmured babel, punctuated occasionally with spasms of unusual tumult. Bream could picture it all, the garish yellow light from the saloon windows, the crowded smoke-filled bars, the deep-chested shouts and laughter, the wolf-howl of delight as men locked in frenzied combat. For an instant he listened. Then, doubly appreciative of the atmosphere in which he found himself, he picked up the thread of his conversation with Eloise and eagerly, hungrily, like children greedy of a new sweet, they set upon their simple intellectual feast.

Bream went home that night stimulated, nervous, strangely excited by the unusual exercise of mind and emotions. His brain raced, mulling over and over arguments and phrases that he had said or might have said. He longed to resume the friendly, interesting discussion and extend it to other fields wherein he knew they stood on common ground.

Eloise sat until eleven reading the book that Bream had brought her. Then as steps sounded on the

verandah she looked up expectantly. A moment later her husband entered.

"Oh, hello, darling!" he cried, as he saw her in the living-room. "Didn't expect to find you up. By George, I've seen sights to-night that beat anything in the world! Too bad you couldn't go along, but that's a little too strong for me, even. I hope Bream was over for a while, so you weren't alone all the evening."

"Yes, he was here and brought me this new Kipling book. I'm simply devouring it!"

His eyes twinkled. "Jolly good of him!" He took the volume. "A book, eh? And with red covers! Well, well. But Ellie, I've got a book in my pocket with yellow covers that's a jolly lot more interesting!" His hand disappeared into the side of his coat and came out holding a thick package of yellow-back bills bound tightly with a rubber strap. "Read that and get happy!" he cried and tossed it into her lap.

The smile died from her face as she picked up the bundle, examining it almost with revulsion. "How did you get all this?" she asked presently, laying the money on the centre-table.

"Got it at roulette; there's about thirteen hundred," he said. The jubilation had gone from his voice and, recovering the bills, he dropped them carelessly into his coat pocket with an almost defiant expression.

"We've got to live you know, Ellie, until we connect with the bank." His tone was almost harsh.

"Of course, Allan." In her reply was patience, sweetness of temper, the softness that turneth away wrath; and yet, too, something more, an intangible condemnation that stood between them like a stone



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wall. She rose and secured her Kipling. "Shall we go up, now?"

With an inexplicable grimace he stood aside to let her pass.

CHAPTER V

THE WOLF LEAPS

BREAM now took hold of the work at the mill with an energy that bade fair to complete it in record time. The principal task was the sorting of the intermingled logs that had composed the three drives. This was accomplished by a comparatively small number of lumberjacks (those who had resisted or not entirely succumbed to dissipation), assisted by "high-bankers," or men who worked regularly at the mill. All day long the brown carpet that filled the stream from bank to bank crept forward, and all day the men leaped and rode and heaved at the crumbling edges, diverting each log into its rightful boom.

Bream himself was chiefly occupied with tally-book and pencil, for as the scalers measured the B. & H. timber he jotted down their figures and totalled them, his object being to tally with the scaling already done on the skidways the winter before, and to determine the loss if any during the drive.

The clear, sunny spring days with their suggestion of mounting vitality spurred on the work, and Hampton seethed with activity. With the shouts of the men in the booms sounded the metallic, snarling song of the saws, the whirr and clang of machinery, and the roar of steam. A pungent smell of sawdust mingled with

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the softer odours from the forest and acrid wood-smoke from the tall iron chimneys.

During this time Bream saw a good deal of Allan Mackenzie. Never obtrusive, but always about, the convalescent exhibited deep interest in the manifold activities at the mill. At odd times when, for some reason, there was a momentary lull, he would chat briefly with the boss or with Hill, whom he had met, asking questions that betrayed an intelligent knowledge of the work. Or he would sit on a pile of sawdust with the men during the dinner hour, overcoming their natural reserve with an easy familiarity.

One morning when Bream reached the mill he found Tom Hill's fourteen-year-old boy waiting for him.

"Here's a letter Pop ast me to give ye," said the lank, freckled urchin, extending a folded sheet of paper. "It's my writin' but he tol' me what to say, an' lammed me ever' time I crabbed the spellin'!"

Bream, with the note in his hand, watched, amused, as the boy disappeared down the street, fish-pole over shoulder. Then he remembered that it was Saturday, and a whimsical longing took him that he might be, himself, once more a boy of the fish-pole age. At the thought, old forgotten scenes leaped before his eyes, old shouts rang in his ears, and the poignant scents of other springs crept into his nostrils. He seemed to span in a moment the years since then and he wondered, with a little panic, if he were growing old. "Youth, youth!" he thought vaguely. "Am I killing it with work up here? Am I to miss youth as some children miss childhood?"

The raucous mill whistle brought him back to reality. "What bosh is this I'm thinking?" he demanded of

himself disgustedly, and opened the paper in his hand.

"Deer Bream," he read, "have went to our Randall mill on Oseko to meet Burchard. Be gone about a week. Look after things till I come back we will plan about next year then. Tom Hill."

For a minute Bream stood, quiet, surprised by this unexpected step and the responsibility so suddenly thrust upon him. Then he commenced the few necessary arrangements to inaugurate the new régime. He turned his tally-book and scaler's record over to Dorlon, one of his foremen, and posted Hill's letter with an additional notice of his own on the mill bulletin board where all the hands could see it. Finally he mounted the stairs to the dingy little office and took up the multitudinous duties that immediately presented themselves.

It was nearly ten o'clock before he had a breathing space and could ponder on the situation that confronted him. He knew without question what had taken Hill to Randall—the purchase of the stumpage in the Y. To Bream's quick mind that line, "we will plan about next year," confessed it. From his knowledge of Hill he deduced that this unexpected move was the result of two causes: the first a desire to steal a swift march on any possible rivals, and the second Hill's own impatience of delay when so much lay at stake.

For Hill so far so good, Bream thought, but what about himself, his own plans? Either he must act quickly and to some purpose or the opportunity that had opened before him would be gone. Already he had made his plans in harmony with the usual program at this time of year. Burchard was not expected

on his annual visit for another ten days, and in half that time the checking would have been finished, leaving him to his own devices. The remaining five days he would devote to attempting to raise the money for the purchase of the coveted Y. Failing in this, he would resort to the Sawpits Bank loan. But now, caught off his balance, unprepared, what should he do? Give up his dream without a struggle? Condemn himself to a life of employment here or of starting anew somewhere else?

The hot blood rose darkly under his tan at the thought. His eyes flashed and his mouth drew into a grim, determined line as he swiftly made his decision. "I'll do it somehow," he muttered, as he had on the day of his arrival with the Mackenzies.

His next thought concerned his position with the firm. As things stood now he was morally certain of Hill's intention regarding the Y timber. On the other hand, Hill was unaware of his own. Clearly that was Hill's misfortune, yet at the same time Bream would not operate secretly against his employer, even in a matter of buying public timber land. He reached for paper and a pen that lay before him on the desk and wrote out two copies of his resignation. One of these he addressed to Burchard & Hill at Randall and sent immediately to the post-office. The other he posted on the bulletin board downstairs alongside the order that had elevated him but three hours before.

When the storm of surprise and protest from his men had passed somewhat, he explained his action in some degree, saying that an important and unexpected event had occurred which would take him out of town for a few days. In answer to their queries he assured them that he would come back, that he ex-

pected to see them all again shortly. Meanwhile, he would remain in his present position until the mill closed that night.

He performed this last act of loyalty principally because he was at a loss for the moment how to proceed. The problem of raising money faced him with the grinning emptiness of a skull.

By Hill's sudden move he had been thrust without alternative upon the course of floating the loan from the bank, a course which, no less now than before, he was reluctant to take. With swift calculation he counted the hours still at his command. Thirty-six! The Company steamer did not leave again until Monday morning and the obscure railroad could not take him to Sawpits. With so much grace he would still be abreast of the departed Hill, for the owner, travelling by Saturday morning boat, railroad, and "cadge" wagon, could not reach Randall until Sunday night.

He still had time, Bream told himself, pounding the arm of his chair gently, and he must contrive some other financial arrangement, some arrangement that did not place him between two millstones—the bank and the monopoly.

A knock on the office door aroused him and he called a summons to enter. The knob turned and Allan Mackenzie peered round the jamb. A moment later he advanced smiling into the room. His face was still swathed in bandages, but the real danger to the fracture was past so that now he had a cigar between his teeth.

"By Jove! Master of the mill!" he said, offering a weed to Bream.

"For three hours, yes, but now no longer. Didn't you see my resignation downstairs?"

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"Come, come, man, quit ragging me!" Mackenzie sat down in the chair near the desk and regarded Bream amusedly.

The two were on excellent terms. Always congenial and seeing much of one another lately, they had passed the first formal stages of friendship and had entered a mutually welcome intimacy. Now, as always, Bream responded to Mackenzie's unfailing good-nature.

"It's no ragging I assure you!" he said laughing. "I'm out of it here."

"Have a row with that beastly animal, Hill? Wouldn't blame you a bit."

"No, something worse than that. The truth is, Allan, I'm in a devil of a fix, and because I don't know where to turn I'm going to ask your advice. Can you listen to my uninteresting affairs?"

"Lucky dog to *have* any affairs! Go on."

Without delay Bream complied. He began at the beginning, and traced his business career from the first day he had entered his father's office as a clerk up to and including his interview with Hill on the day he had brought the Mackenzies down. He explained his ambition and outlined the timber situation in the Oseko, showing Mackenzie on the faded map the strategically located Y and the expanse of virgin forest that it controlled.

"With ten years' more cutting before them, B. & H. want to buy that fifteen million feet," he said bitterly, "and practically bottle up the district forever. They don't need it and I do. I've got to have it."

"Then where's your difficulty? Buy it."

"I can't, unless I can somehow raise twenty or thirty thousand dollars. I have only half the money that

I need." And he explained the present status of the financial situation.

During the recital Mackenzie had slumped down in his chair, his legs thrust straight out before him, his hands in his pockets, his dead cigar twitching between his teeth. Apparently lost in thought, his heavy lids had dropped down over his eyes giving him unconsciously an inscrutable, calculating expression. When Bream had finished his narrative Mackenzie remained for some time without speaking. Then he slowly drew his knees up and crossed them.

"You're pretty well had, I'll admit," he said slowly, and paused. "But there must be a way out, there's *got* to be a way out!" He mouthed his cigar, staring at the floor.

"And the Sawpits Bank?" asked Bream anxiously. "Would you float that loan?"

Mackenzie shook his head slowly. "Not if I could get the money any other way. How much time have you?"

"Till Monday morning's steamer."

Again Mackenzie shook his head. Then he rose. "Let me think this over, Dick," he said. "I've seen these things done before and I ought to find a way out. Give me a little time. I want to help you if I can."

"By George, if you do I'll never forget it!"

"Nonsense, Dick. You did me a good turn. Come over to the house to-night. Eloise has been asking about you." He opened the door.

"I'll be there," said Bream laughing, and Mackenzie with a wave of his hand went out.

CHAPTER VI

THE FOX CONTRIVES

HE descended the stairs slowly and crossed the sawdust street, greeting two or three men who were hanging about the team entrance to the mill. Then, lost in thought, he walked slowly along the caulk-pitted sidewalk, slapping his knee mechanically with a green switch he carried. Dirty children playing nearby laughed up at him as he passed, drawn by something in him to which all sentient things responded, and their slatternly mothers, standing in the unkempt front yards, smiled at the "fine, handsome feller what had his jaw broke." But for once Mackenzie's cheery, answering word and smile were lacking in response; concentrated consideration of Bream's problem made him oblivious of his surroundings.

Ten minutes' walk along the main road took him out of town and into the quiet of the forest where, presently finding a fallen log, he sat down to think. So deep was his thought that he remained almost motionless, staring at the leaf-mould between his feet. At the end of an hour he rose with a briskness that implied inspiration or decision and took his way towards Mrs. Barry's.

He found Eloise seated by the window upstairs, thimble on finger, overhauling their outfit. He gently kissed the cheek she offered him and then

walked almost nervously about the room, filling his pipe.

"Why such diligence, dear?" he inquired presently.

"Only the usual mend, Allan. I never know when you will want to move on. We've been here ten days already, and that's a long while for us." She snipped her heavy brown thread and shifted the skirt that lay across her knee. He continued to walk aimlessly about, pretending to inspect the coloured chromos that hung on the flimsy walls. Presently she asked: "Have you any plans, Allan?"

"Now that you mention it," he replied casually, "something has occurred to me."

She let her hands fall into her lap and looked up at him. "You expect to stay on here then?"

"Yes. For a while, at least."

That sudden dropping of her hands, a motion listless and a little hopeless, was not lost upon him. He was prepared for the alarmed, almost suspicious intonation of her voice as she asked:

"Why? What are you going to do? Surely there's nothing here you want!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I think it will be advantageous for us to stay, that's all. I think I can make some money here." He met her gaze almost defiantly as he sank uneasily into a chair opposite to her.

A slow chill of misery crept into her blood and spread through her body. This thing that she had come to dread, as youth dreads death, had stirred and was about to enter her life again.

"Oh, Allan!" It was a cry of pleading, born of the sorrows he had heaped upon her in the past.

"Good, honest money, from a good, honest in-

vestment," he repeated, and spoke with conscious pride.

Apparently oblivious of his words, she flung the skirt from her lap and sprang up, her clenched fists crushed to her burning cheeks. Tears were in her eyes.

"Again!" she cried. "Must we go through it again! . . . But it's always the same! . . . Honest money! . . . Not a dollar of it have you ever made! . . . Somebody always suffers! Always!"

"Dearest!" His voice was gentle. "Won't you believe me? I swear that this is genuine! It's a matter of my own money entirely."

"Oh, how many times have I heard you swear and seen you break your word! It was the same with those poor Russian farmers in Alberta and your worthless soil improvements, and it was the same with that salted mine last winter. You have—have lied—yes, there is no other word—lied to me so often before that why should I believe you now?" She turned from him and stood looking through the window with unseeing eyes.

"Please, dearest!" There was hurt in his tones. "I can't seem to make you understand. Those things had to do with other people's money; this has to do with my own."

"What money of yours do you mean?"

He laughed a little sheepishly. "The only real money I've got. My legacy. It has escaped so far, owing to my luck the other night, but I'm afraid that now its time has come."

His words arrested her and she considered. Perhaps, after all, he was telling the truth. Surely he would not foolishly risk the sum that, in hard times,

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was their only bulwark against the world. "Is your own money all that goes into this—this venture?" she asked.

"No," he told her frankly, "but it's a square deal either way. We stand to win or lose together."

"We? Whom do you mean?"

"Bream and I. . . . Hard to believe isn't it? But he was really responsible. He was in a tight place financially—matter of life and death with him—and he came to me for advice. I held him off till I could think, and if he's to be got out of the hole this is the only way. I want to help him if I can. He did us a good turn that day on the river——"

"Oh, Allan! Not he!" Her eyes shone and her voice was deep with reproach. "Do you realise that we haven't a better friend in the world than Mr. Bream? He likes us, likes us both; you for what you can be and me, well, for the life I had once."

"Before you married me!" he exclaimed with calm bitterness, a spasm of pain contracting his pale face. "God knows I wish now, for your sake, that I hadn't done it! But then—I couldn't let you go! All my life you are the only human being I have ever loved."

"Please, please," she begged him.

He sighed during a moment's pause. "Now this thing about Dick," he went on almost with an effort. "Let me explain it to you."

He repeated in detail what Bream had told him in regard to the financial and logging situation.

"He has twenty thousand and my legacy's twenty-seven. I'll throw in any or all of it as he prefers," he concluded with a wave of his hand. "I am firmly convinced that the purchase of that timber in the Y will make our fortunes and make them honestly!"

Eloise, who through the long narration had gradually regained her composure, remained silent after this faintly grandiloquent conclusion—silent and unconvinced. She knew her husband thoroughly; every note of his voice, every gesture of his expressive hands, every turn of his mind. She had listened to similar protestations many times before in their three years of married life and each time they had proven false. For somewhere, in some unsuspected cranny of each proposition, had been tucked away a joker that, to her, placed the deal outside the pale of honour though within the letter of the law. Was there one in this case? If so, what was it?

She looked at her husband. He was smiling at her affectionately, his eyes mirroring that intense love, almost worship, that was at once the greatest contradiction and the only genuine emotion of his nature. The anomaly of it struck home to her again as it had done a thousand times before. That he could love her so and yet make her so constantly unhappy!

"Allan," she said in a low voice, "there is something else, a loophole somewhere; there always is. I feel it, I know it! You will do as you have done before. You can't help it." She paused, but he made no reply. Then she leaned towards him, twisting her hands together and fixing him with a look of intense supplication. "Oh, don't do it, this time! *Please*, this once! *Let's go away!* I'll pack up. See, everything is here! I'll do it quickly and we can go to-day. You are well enough now. We'll go south as you thought at first! Oh—" her voice trembled, "don't you see what this has meant to me? Just for once to have had friends like other people?— To have lived

ten days without their beginning to suspect?" She broke off abruptly.

He shrugged almost indifferently.

"If there is a loophole as you suggest," he said, "I haven't found it yet. The point is that unless Bream finds a way out of his difficulty in thirty-six hours his chance of a lifetime will be gone. I like Dick better than any man I've ever met, and I intend to give him that chance. He's coming here to-night, and I think that he and I will enter into partnership. That's my final decision, Eloise."

He calmly picked up a scientific work on lumbering that Bream had lent him, and commenced to read.

She remained silent, realising the hopelessness of argument, chilled with doubt and trembling for her brief happiness. Was Allan sincere for once? Was it his idea to help Bream freely and generously—Bream, who, these ten days, had brought into her life more of the things she longed for than anyone since her marriage?

After five minutes she glanced at Mackenzie. He was reading placidly, smoking his pipe, interested, for the moment a picture of domesticity.

Suddenly the old fear reasserted itself. Knowing him so well she began to doubt.

Was it natural for him (under any circumstances) to prop up a tottering scheme with his little fortune unless he could see the end as clearly as the beginning? She knew it was not, for, though he spent what he made like water, he never risked it except at the gaming table. And yet he had spoken of Bream and himself winning or losing together!

The circumstances of the deal seemed scarcely to bear this out. Bream was in a position where he

would accept almost any terms rather than resort to the bank for his loan. Mackenzie, who was notoriously cold-blooded in deals of this kind, was all anxiety to leap to the rescue. Could it be friendship for Bream that prompted this? Decidedly not; despite his assertion to the contrary!

Her heart contracted as the certainty came home that her husband had deceived her again. Bream might lose but she knew Allan would not. The conviction grew momentarily stronger that there was, indeed, a loophole as she had suspected; that somewhere back in her husband's clever brain the exception, the evasion lay germinating towards its evil fruit.

Her head drooped with despair and disappointment as she sat down opposite him and took up the skirt she had been mending.

Bream severed his connection with B. & H. that night in a mood of thankfulness for release that contained very little sentimental attachment to past associations. Mackenzie's unexpected desire to help him in his difficulty had raised eleventh-hour hopes, and he felt that buoyant courage that comes with the throwing off of long-endured fetters. Mind, body, and soul, each at last its own master, longed for the fight ahead, the fight with circumstance, nature, and humanity that would decide, one way or the other, the matter of his survival among the Titans of his world. In this mood he arrived at Mrs. Barry's after dinner.

Eloise wore the one pretentious dress of her slender wardrobe, a dark blue cloth affair lightened at neck, waist, and wrists, with touches of dull red velvet, and

having black braid on the front. The donning of it had been to Allan a sign of returning spirits; to her it was a bitterly whimsical decking forth for the sacrifice of her one friendship. Her chestnut hair, heavy and abundant, was coiled about her head; a shadowy mass that lightened the clear pallor of her skin. Her lips lacked some of their colour, and her eyes did not smile with them in greeting.

Because of the unusual warmth of the night the three sat on the low porch and watched the slow metamorphosis of a distant reach of the lake from pearl to opal and, at last, to polished steel. But Allan, easy and talkative, the experienced host, did not wait long before bringing the important subject forward.

"I hope you won't mind, Dick," he said, "because I have talked the matter of your business over with Eloise. There was a certain matter about which I wished to consult her."

"Of course not. I only hope the consultation was a success." Bream turned to the girl, smiling, but she seemed not to have heard. Her face, proud and pale, was turned towards the distant sunset and tinged with its rosy colour. She seemed lost in the contemplation of some far vision.

"It was," said Allan, with a dryness that was lost on Bream, "and this is the result of it: I want to go in on that lumber deal with you myself."

"You! By George, Allan, if you could!" Dick leaned forward eagerly for a moment, and then relaxed into his seat again. "But you're just 'ragging,' as you call it! You can't, you——"

"Now just a minute," broke in Mackenzie. "I *can*. I've an aunt's legacy of something like twenty-seven thousand dollars lying idle in the Bank of

Canada at Montreal, and I've been looking for a good chance to invest it. I think I've found that chance. But let me make myself clear. I'm doing this because I expect to make money; that is my first consideration. Consequently, you can see how much faith I am putting in you and your descriptions of the land you want to buy. I accept them unreservedly."

"Thank you," said Bream, "I appreciate that tremendously. Any man is a fool who buys timber without first seeing it himself, and your faith in me is the sincerest compliment of my life. But I wonder if *my* needs in the matter are quite clear. It isn't only money I want, you know, but a partner, a man who will go into the woods with me and follow every detail of the business, suggesting and helping and checking me if necessary."

"Yes, I understand that."

Bream's forehead wrinkled with puzzlement. "B-but I thought you couldn't stay here in Hampton, that you had business farther south."

Mackenzie drew several cigars from his pocket and offered one to Bream. Then he cut the end off another with his knife and presently lighted both of them deliberately. The ceremony consumed a few minutes during which there was silence between them. Now the light on the distant vista of the lake had faded, and the sky was dark except for a yellow glow that rose above "Paradise Alley." The shouts and tumult of Saturday night revelry came to them plainly through the still air.

"I *had* intended to go on from here," said Mackenzie seriously, "but, thinking the matter over this afternoon, I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing I cannot arrange almost as well by

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wire or mail. That feature of it need give you no concern."

"By George, how lucky!" cried Bream, relieved. "Then we can get to business at once. We haven't much time, you know."

"Exactly. I've thought of that, and here's my idea of the quickest way to push things through. If I can get to Sawpits some time to-morrow, I can connect with an afternoon express south on the Canadian Central that will land me at Celta Junction in the evening. From there I can catch another train directly across to Montreal, arriving Monday morning. I'll draw the money as soon as the bank opens, and come back to Toronto on the first convenient train. However, I'm afraid that this will delay me too much to buy the land Monday, but I'll get it the first thing Tuesday and return here as soon as possible."

Bream pondered for a few moments. "I guess that's the best you can do," he said at last. "Now, about getting to Sawpits." He paused. "Look here, are you good for a day's paddling?"

"Oh, yes. I've done many of them."

"Then if we start from here by canoe at sunrise to-morrow, we should be able to connect with that train at Sawpits, providing this weather holds."

"Good! I hadn't thought of that! It solves the problem. And by the way, what do you think about Burchard, Dick? Could he reach Toronto ahead of me?"

"He might if he started from Randall almost as soon as Hill arrived there. But I don't think he will. In the first place Randall is farther from the railroad than we are, and, furthermore, it would mean night travel in a canoe for him and he is pretty old for that. I don't think we need worry."

For a time they smoked in silence. Eloise, a dark blot in the shadow, drew her wrap more closely about her as the night coolness increased. Finally Mackenzie shifted his position and cleared his throat.

"If we're going into this thing, Dick," he said, "it seems to me we might as well go into it right."

"Yes, of course."

"So I've asked Dave Sturgis, the justice of the peace, to come over and make legal a set of partnership papers I've drawn up. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly," said Bream. Then, a moment later, he laughed. "Do you realise, Allan," he asked in a tone that was half apology, half amusement, "that I don't know the first thing about you—who you are, or where you came from, or anything at all?"

Mackenzie, amused in turn, chuckled comfortably. "I'd never thought of it," he said, "but it's true. Now if the professor will kindly turn on the tremolo I will tell the story of my life." He continued to chuckle as he relighted his cigar.

"Well," he resumed, "come right down to it and there's not much to tell. I belong to the family of Mackenzies that has made history in Canada, the line that has the northern river named after it, and my home, until after I was grown, was Montreal. My parents are still living there. When I had gone through McGill University for a couple of scientific degrees I couldn't stand it any more, and broke away from all the fol-de-rol I'd been brought up to. Truth is, I've been a wanderer by instinct all my life, and I suppose I'll never be anything else. I'm one of the queer crowd that likes to accompany the first wave of civilisation into wild places. I like to try new experiments and have unusual experiences. I loathe the

atmosphere of proper society life. "I'm a poor man now though I've made money at times. Fact is, I haven't sense enough to hang on to the stuff, and that's one reason I want to get my legacy into this lumber venture. I think it's safe and sound and will keep my money better than I could." He paused as though pondering. "That's about all there is to know, Dick," he concluded.

"It's plenty," said Bream.

"Thanks. From what you have told Eloise and me of yourself I can say the same. In the matter of pedigree I gather that we are about equally guaranteed as partners. From the business standpoint each of us will have to take the other on faith, trusting that he will work his everlasting head off to save his little capital. I couldn't imagine a better basis of partnership, could you?"

"No, I could not," laughed Bream. "We don't really need the papers with that spur in our sides."

"No, but it's better so, and if I'm not much mistaken that's Sturgis coming along the walk now." Mackenzie stood up and walked to the edge of the porch.

At the same instant Eloise rose, shivering in the real summer warmth of the night, and walked towards the door.

"I hope you will excuse me," she said, holding out an icy hand to Bream, "I feel so wretchedly I can hardly hold my head up."

"I'm sorry!" he cried regretfully. "Our everlasting business has made us very rude to you to-night. You haven't had a chance to say a word, and now you're going in!"

"Oh, my remarks could not possibly have carried

any weight," she replied deprecatingly, as she left them.

The newcomer clumping along the sidewalk proved to be Dave Sturgis as Allan had surmised, a dry, philosophical little man who was much impressed with the honour of his office.

"Wal, gents," he said familiarly, "you're on the porch for the last time in *one* spell. This warm weather'll turn loose every fly an' skeet in creation."

Presently the three went inside and proceeded to business. When read, the partnership papers appeared simple, providing that each man should put in an equal sum of money—\$20,000—and that all property, both land and equipment, should be held in equal amount by each partner. It further was provided that neither member of the firm should make any important move without consulting the other, and that in matters concerning the practical side of the business Bream should have the final authority.

When all was settled Mr. and Mrs. Barry were called in from the kitchen and witnessed the signatures without knowing the exact import of the documents. Before he left the justice gave assurance of secrecy in the matter for a week.

When he had gone Allan turned to Bream.

"You're sure that the five thousand apiece I provided for equipment is enough, Dick?" he asked.

"For this year, yes. I'm positive of it. If we deliver the goods the first season we can spread out the next. It's the future beyond that Y that matters, not so much the Y itself and its fifteen million feet. The hundreds of millions that we will control are the

game to play for. There's our stake, Allan, and it's a thundering good big stake!"

"It is, at that!" assented Mackenzie with proper enthusiasm.

CHAPTER VII

"THE DAY THAT YOU REMEMBER"

BY Tuesday night of the next week, Dr. Cavanaugh considered that he might go fishing with a clear conscience Wednesday. After Saturday night's revelry but one man remained in the snake-room, and Marty—he who lacked a surname but was of mighty prowess notwithstanding—had confided to his chief that "th' mutt would be out in a day or so lookin' like a cinder, b'Gee, but able to birl white wather yet, b'Jove!"

Consequently the relieved disciple of Izaak Walton laid his plans. First he summoned Tommy Hill, the mill-owner's son, and instructed him concerning the time and place, agreeing to take all responsibility for the truancy the adventure involved. Then, in fulfillment of a promise made previously, he called at Mrs. Barry's to ask the company of the Mackenzies. He was disappointed to find Eloise husbandless.

"Yes, Allan is in Toronto on business to-day," she told him. "He has been gone since Sunday. I'm *so* sorry. I've looked forward often to the time when you would take us fishing!"

"Then, my dear, fishing you go!" cried he, burning with that zeal peculiar to heroes of the rod. "I've been so busy with my week-end crop up at the house that I didn't know your husband had even thought of

leaving Hampton. But that needn't make the slightest difference."

"Some other time will do just as well," pleaded the girl, laughing.

The eagle-eyed, white-crested old man eyed her sternly. "My dear, you don't know what you say! There can be no other time like this! I'm to have Tommy Hill in my canoe, the greatest trout finder in the county. Why, that boy can smell trout when he passes over 'em in the water! Another time he may not go, for he gets a hiding if he's caught, so to-morrow stands by itself for fishing chances! Now for someone to paddle you. If I could only get Dick! He's such good company—but I suppose he is busy at the mill."

"No," said Eloise, "he is not. He resigned last Saturday. It would be jolly if he could go along!"

"Thunder! how things happen in this town!" barked Cavanaugh. "I hadn't heard of that! But I'll look him up right away." He stepped back off the porch. "And I'll let you know as soon as I can. You must bring your lunch, of course."

"And I'll bring Mr. Bream's," she added. "Men are so messy and fussy about such things. Tell him, will you?"

"Yes. It'll be one of my inducements."

"That was hardly gallant," she cried after him as he hurried away.

He waved his hands helplessly. Half an hour later he returned. "It's all right," he said. "Dick was going off by himself anyway, so I roped him in for you."

"Unhappy fisherman!" she cried.

"But most fortunate of mortals!" he retorted, at more leisure to accept her challenge.

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What is the essence of Youth but the refinement of anticipation? Your ninety-year cub (and there are many nowadays) lives in a state of mental and spiritual expectation—looking forward to the pleasurable unforeseen. Your aged dolt of fifty, seeing his natural force abate, believes that he has run the gamut and that life holds forth no interest but the observation of his own decline.

Nature, whose unhurried, homely ways illustrate Truth as easily for every new creed as for those outworn, set this fact of anticipation down early in her primer of life. Who has stood quiet in the vast silence of the brooding snows and not sensed that beneath that slumber is a slow gathering of vital forces that must break forth into glorious warmth and colour? Who has not known in his soul beyond all argument that that spotless sepulchre of death shelters the germ of life, that all is in a miraculous, static anticipation? How much more so, then, with us who are called animate beings! If life be anticipation how then can death, but one incident in life, be aught else?

But back to our essence of Youth! Anticipation! Flavour it with a sprig of freedom, a pinch of daring, and one unpeeled triumph; mix well and we have the mood of one Dick Bream as, rod over shoulder, he sets forth to the enjoyment of his last untrammelled day.

Behold, then, the embarkation. A bulging, string-tied shoe-box, the rods, and a nest of blankets are the only duffle in the canoe; there is a lake before, blue as the aura of genius and sparkling like rare conversation, a friendly sun behind making into crystal the pine-pure air; there is laughter and banter and much

prophecy of the day's events, and a round wager that hangs upon the verdict of the scales.

There is a mood in things that makes music of the crisping paddle-dip and poetry of the leap of the canoe; that discovers white-fleshed dryads lurking among the silver birches of the water's edge, and imagines gnomes in the deep-hidden forest hollows. Youth! The miracle of it is everywhere except—

Eloise, kneeling in the bow, responded to Dick's banter with laughing lips, but her eyes were bleak like the soul within her. The bells that celebrated his triumphant partnership rang cracked and hollow in her ears. The light of undefeated, eager youth that glowed in his face blinded her when she looked upon it, and made her cringe. In imagination she could see the succeeding tragedy of disillusion blotting out that light like some spreading plague-spot. Was this, then, to her, all of youth, this ghastly watching the approach to the chasm? The treachery of her position caused her to rebel against God for the place in which she stood, for she was young although her heart was wise in sorrow.

But Dick laughed. He sang; he was overflowing with a prodigal fellowship. His immense vitality drew in the sun and sent it out again in shimmering waves of boyish attraction. Slowly these closed about her icy heart until it stirred and softened towards him with a moist-eyed gratitude for the gifts of soul.

And presently, after they had met the others at a secluded spot, and Bream had laid authority upon her with delicious daring, her bleak eyes melted to the frank warmth of his laughing ones, and she thought: "God help me! Can I refuse him because my own heart is bitter? It is his day; let him remember it

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forever!" And through her mind ran Swinburne's lines:

"The day that you remember,
The day that I forget."

"I wonder shall I forget?" she asked herself.

Then she settled down in the nest of blankets facing him (this was his command), and played at passenger while he brayed ridiculous, lumberman's chanties to the sky until Dr. Cavanaugh growled that he would scare the fish to Fundy.

Now they had turned up Shadow River, a glassy, tortuous stream that emptied into Basque Lake at Rabbit Bay. Once, to the right, they passed the tangled, brush-constructed home of a beaver colony. Mossy logs and stumps rose from the water at grotesque angles sheltering fleets of lily-pads; black, blasted pines with reddish needles leaned perilously out from either bank and housed flocks of quarrelling crows or a blue, white-ringed fish-hawk. On both sides massed the forest hosts in Lincoln green, their banner a luminous strip of blue sky. And everywhere was silence except for the sounds of the creatures that God put there—fluting robins, jays that screamed and fought among the tree-tops, twittering kingbirds, wrangling swallows, mellow warblers and thrushes, impudent crows and saucy squirrels.

The air was fragrant, for the balsam was beginning to smell, and occasionally the penetrating fresh-water odour of the river swept down in cool, damp breaths.

At the foot of a little falls that foamed and chattered in the stillness, the Doctor held up an impressive hand.

His eye was bright, almost fevered, his whole being tense. The great moment was at hand.

"Tommy says here!" he cried. "You folks take one side and we'll take the other."

So they fished. And never had Tommy sensed the trout so well. Gamy, silver-speckled fellows and their larger brethren of the salmon strain, ravenous after the winter, rose to the flies with joyous regularity. And Eloise, rubber-booted in the shallows, whipped her line back and forth with the best of them, so that her string outnumbered both Bream's and the Doctor's. But not the boy's; for he, as Cavanaugh said, seemed to "smell them out" and to drop his fly with uncanny success before their silly, bulging eyes.

Then came the hour when the sun was overhead and the blue camp-fire smoke drifted sidewise across the tapestry of the forest, bearing with it the mingled aromas of pine and coffee and broiling fish—a very treasure of an hour made torment by appetite. And afterward that blissful half-hour when, warmed and fed, man offers the incense of the Weed in thanks to the powers that be. A half an hour—no longer—and the Compleat Angler will be stirring. So stirred Cavanaugh for, said he, they must portage around the falls into the upper stream. But Dick lay stubbornly on his back, his pipe between his teeth.

"Go on with your murdering if you like, Doc," he said, with a great air of disapproval. "I've slain enough of God's creatures for one day."

"And eaten enough of them too," rejoined Eloise, sniffing, for they had dared each other to mighty feats and she had lost. "Don't look so virtuous."

"But I *feel* so virtuous," he complained. "I could lie here all day contemplating my qualities."

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“That isn’t virtue, it’s food,” she told him. “What is to become of me under these extraordinary circumstances?”

He pulled a book out of a water-proof side-pocket and handed it to her. “You may read to me,” he condescended. “I’ve dog-eared the page at my place.”

For a minute she endeavoured to be stern. Then his merry, twinkling smile conquered her. “Oh, dear! I suppose I shall have to,” she wailed. “I can’t resist Jack London even to discipline you!”

The Doctor whose scorn for Bream’s desertion demanded revenge now sought it. “You might read to yourself, Mrs. Mackenzie,” he suggested. “Then what would the lazy animal do?”

“Oh, good! I hadn’t thought of that!” She clasped the book between her hands, hugged it to her breast, and danced around the glowing embers of the fire. Bream observed her for a moment with a complacent, almost idiotic smile. Then he reached into another pocket and produced a second volume.

“Read on, Mackenzie,” he paraphrased, with an airy wave of his hand, “and bored be he who first cries ‘Hold! Enough!’ Bored by insects I mean,” he explained.

“Oh, you’re incorrigible!” she cried pouting, and sat down suddenly upon the log they had drawn up to the fire.

“Well,” interrupted Cavanaugh drily, “this looks like an all-day affair. Will we find you here when we come back later?”

“Depends on the quality of our authors,” said Bream, “but it’s probable.”

“All right. So long.” The wiry old man and the

boy heaved up their canoe for the short portage and disappeared, crashing, through the brush.

For a long period of silence the two left behind endeavoured to read in the lee of the fire. Then Bream slapped his book down viciously while tears from the smarting wood-smoke coursed down his nose.

"I'm licked!" he declared, leaping to his feet. "No genius ever lived who could carry the day against deer-flies and mosquitoes. Let's get out of here!"

"Let's," she cried fervently, in the jargon of childhood. "I'm perishing!"

They wrote a note to the Doctor on a bit of paper and then put their few things in the canoe.

"What do you say? Shall we paddle downstream to the lake? We will keep moving anyway, and perhaps we can find a place to read there."

"Perfect." She nestled down contentedly in the canoe and drooped one hand over the gunwale into the clear, cold water.

He rambled on in an endless stream of talk, now witty, now serious, now in a strain of poetry that rang true because of the buoyant, clear-eyed youth of him. He enjoyed it, chuckling over his inexplicable volubility.

"I'm positively garrulous," he told her. "You must forgive me; I have never suffered from it before."

"As long as I don't suffer you may continue."

"Humph! You ought to suffer since you are responsible for it!"

"I?" She was politely incredulous, looking at him beneath arched and lifted eyebrows.

"You!" he repeated firmly. "It's so many years since I have had the pleasure of such delightful company that I am quite unnerved. It's positively

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startling to know a woman whose interests extend beyond a struggle to make both ends meet and the care of children in assorted sizes. Fine, honest women, lumbermen's wives are, but—" he shrugged helplessly,—"you understand!"

"You censure but to praise," she said with mock demureness. "I shall reciprocate with praise without censure. You have helped give me a delightful ten days, Mr. Bream."

He glanced at her with twinkling eyes.

"Arch-plotter!" he grumbled. "You want to read the rest of my books."

"Discovered?" she wailed, and then added brightly, "but I'll discuss them all with you."

"Ah, that will be payment in full for everything. But I am a very exacting creditor."

"And I a most scrupulous debtor."

"Good! Then we shall get along together splendidly!"

"While there is yet a book unread."

He assumed an expression of extraordinary craft. "I have you in my power," he asserted triumphantly. "I have ordered a dozen new books from Toronto!"

They ran out of the mouth of the river into the blue bay about which rose the thickly wooded hills. From this point Hampton was invisible and inaudible, and in all the expanse of water, forest, and sky they were apparently the only living things. He guided the canoe out towards the middle of the little bay and sat back basking in the warm sun.

"Now read," he commanded, "genius will prosper here."

And, opening her book, she read aloud London's grim story of the old northern Indian who, because of

his age, is abandoned by his tribe to fight alone his last battle with starvation, darkness, and iron cold. When she had finished they were silent, oppressed by the inexorable despair of the tragedy.

Then, presently, because she was of the north country herself, she spun out for him Indian folk-lore tales, bred ages before in the gloomy depths of primeval forests, and sang weird, ululating songs that stirred the blood in him while they made him shiver. The boyish enthusiasm left his face and gave place to a gentle melancholy.

"That last song," he said, "is one of the beautiful things of the world. I never heard it before but I know it is so."

"Why?"

"Because the word pictures have made me sure again of the wonderful privilege of simply living."

"Have you ever doubted it?" Her eyes searched his brave, wholesome face curiously.

"No, I don't think so. Not even when I was in my greatest trouble. But one forgets the fact sometimes in the hurry and fight of accomplishing things." He rested his paddle and waved one arm towards the fresh green forest. "Just as one forgets the miracle of this every spring, or the miracle of the thousand colours every fall. That song made me realise them again."

"Then the unknown Indian poet did not live in vain. To have caused one such realisation is excuse enough for any life."

"Oh, I like that!" His eyes flashed. "It's such a splendid answer to the Great Doubt. All the wise men in the world couldn't give a better."

"Perhaps I give it out of the depths of my ignorance," she smiled.

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"No! Out of your wisdom. For the greatest folly of all is to try and reduce faith to an equation—and faith in the finest things is at the bottom of your ignorance."

"And you believe I have that faith?"

"*I know it!* It is as much a part of you as the air you breathe."

She looked away from him and her eyes brooded upon the silent green places. A feeling of peace and delight stole over her as the sense of bitter reality, the recollections of fact, faded. It was sweet, this genuine tribute to what she had feared was lost in her. The seeds of his own fine faith fell gratefully upon the fallow ground of her heart and brought the tears to her eyes.

"The day that you remember,
The day that I forget."

"The day that *I* remember," she thought, and, borne on a stream of quiet ecstasy, yielded herself to the evanescent bliss of the perfect hour.

He talked on quietly, seriously, and each moment brought a new light or colour to her mind, played upon a different note in the gamut of her stirring nature, filled her nostrils with a fresh perfume of joy.

The hours passed, slipping away swift-footed, and the golden languor of springtime seemed doubly rare through the medium of their perfect, innocent companionship.

At last, when the sun hung poised above the western hills, Bream turned their curved prow homeward. Red gold was on the water and blushing rose upon the stately cloud flotilla that beat slowly into the west like burdened galleons. Ricocheting across the water

came the quavering, idiotic laughter of a flock of loons, black specks in the distance, giving answer, it seemed, to the thin whining songs from the red mills that stood out tall and clear in the village. Along the further shore crawled another craft, the Doctor's, and they laughed as they pictured his disgust at their weak-kneed sportsmanship.

Then, presently, as Bream drove them strongly homeward, came another sound, a sound foreign to the wild stillness and beauty, an even, regular beating, and, around a long projecting point behind them, appeared the Company steamer trailing a cloud of low-lying smoke.

"Ah, the steamer!" cried Bream eagerly, resting his paddle to watch its approach. "I wonder if Allan is aboard her? He should be back to-night."

"Yes,—I—wonder."

As if the sun had suddenly sunk behind the hills, the light that, all day, had made her loveliness seem almost unearthly, died from Eloise's face. She closed her eyes as she listened to the tiny crashes with which the fabric of her dream collapsed. The brief illusion spun of sunlight and the joy of youth melted into nothing.

Half an hour later as they drew near the landing, the steamer overtook them and, as she raised her eyes, they rested upon the slim, blue-clad figure of her husband leaning upon the rail near the wheel-house.

The day was done.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOOPHOLE

ALLAN brought with him the deed to the sections of timberland that he had gone south to purchase. It was made out to himself and Bream jointly, and bore the great seal and arms of the Province, insuring beyond question the legality and authenticity of the title. B. & H. had been defeated without a struggle.

Bream took carefully into his hand the crackling paper that represented his dream achieved, and fingered and read it almost as if in awe. Like a boy with a long-desired possession, he admired the physical appearance of it, the colour of the seal, the quality of the paper, the transcription of his name. He said little but he felt much, and placed that paper high in the sacred places of his life.

That night Bream made out a check to Allan for fifteen thousand dollars, and this the latter mailed to the Sawpits Bank, for he had opened a private account there on his way back from Toronto.

Within a few days the news of the partnership was common property in Hampton and the partners had become doubtful heroes, for, while folk wished the new venture all prosperity, they frankly doubted its success, and feared the fury and revenge of B. & H.

At the same time they rejoiced in the wholesome check the other had evidently received.

That it was so considered at home was made plain by Tom Hill's attitude when he returned to Hampton. He clumped about the town looking for Bream with the air of a toothache-tortured bear, his face scowling blackly, his fists deep in his pockets, his little eyes a-squint. He at last located his erstwhile river-boss in the little shanty that Bream had rented for a song and termed the "office."

"What the devil have you been up to?" he demanded, refusing the chair that Bream indicated.

"You ought to know," was the matter-of-fact reply. "I only hope you are not going to be unpleasant about what can't be helped."

"You do, eh? Well, you hope again! What you did was a — — piece of — — treachery."

"You're mistaken there," said Bream coldly, scorning to take offence at the man's abuse. "While you were in Randall didn't you receive my resignation dated ten o'clock in the morning of the day you went away?"

"Humph!" Hill snorted angrily. "Don't try to spring that! Anyone can dope out a dated alibi."

"You'll find a copy of it on the mill bulletin board," Bream told him, "and plenty of witnesses to prove the hour I stuck it up there."

Hill leaned against the door-jamb looking out, one heavy boot crossed over the other, his little, blood-shot, glittering eyes sullenly regarding the activities of his great mill. For a few moments he was silent. Then he turned menacingly back to Bream.

"You're pretty sloppy with excuses!" he thundered, thrusting his bearded face forward. "But they

don't go with me! You knew at the time what our firm was going to do and——"

"You're mistaken again," said Bream coolly. "Certainly your note to me that morning was vague enough—and purposely so, too, I'll wager."

"Well, damn it, you knew anyway! You heard me say I thought we ought to get that Y. And then as soon as my back was turned you stole it away from us!"

"That is not true, Mr. Hill!" Bream's tone was quiet but hard. "I stole nothing away from you. You forget that it was I who discovered the Y in the first place and came and told you about it. You had a whole year to take it up if you wished to do so; you could have sent other men to cruise it without waiting for my report, but you did neither of these things. You took the risk that your monopoly would go unchallenged indefinitely—and you lost. I have now and have always had as much right to the Y as you. It was free Government land."

"And it was practically ours—had been for years!" Hill choked with impotent fury as the truth Bream spoke went home.

"Yes, but you remember I said that the Government wasn't sentimental about such things?"

Hill, who remembered perfectly and who had actually taken his unexpected journey on the spur of that sentence, viewed Bream's expostulation as insult added to injury and burst into uncontrollable anger. With great fists clenched, face congested, and the cords of his neck standing out, he leaned over Bream's flat-top table and cursed him until breath failed. "You stole that land, you traitor!" he panted, "and now God help you! If you think it's any joke to

get that timber out, just try it! And when you're broke and down and out don't come whinin' around here for a job! By God I'll hound you through this country till you can't get a hand's turn of work. I will, so help me! An' that's my say!"

Somehow Bream finally got rid of him without a physical encounter. For awhile the incident depressed him, but he eventually consoled himself with the thought that it was only what one might expect from a man of Hill's outlook, and he was able that night to give Eloise and Allan a humorous account of the meeting. Then he forgot it completely, for there was too much else to occupy his mind. The firm of Bream and Mackenzie was in the throes of organization.

The first step was the hiring of the men, and Bream undertook it the night that saw the completion of the work at the B. & H. mill. Al Borwell and Pete Dorlon, his former lieutenants, he engaged on the spot for walking boss and foreman of the new camp, and they, with loyalty to their leader undimmed, yearned both for a chance to serve him and to square matters with Hill for many remembered abuses. In a conference with them Bream named for employment some sixty-five men from his former gangs and left the actual hiring to them. A combined clerk and scaler was found in the person of Barry, and Bream then turned his attention to the important matter of securing good logging teams.

Meanwhile Mackenzie had not been idle. In several trips to Sawpits (the Company steamer was chartered as a mail and freight carrier and forced to take passengers), he had perfected the financial standing of the new firm. First he had started a new bank account under the name of Bream and Mackenzie

in the Sawpits Bank, and to this had transferred \$5,000 from the private accounts of both himself and Bream—in this way providing the sum to be spent for equipment. Furthermore, he had seen to the printing of stationery, time-books, time-slips, and other matter incident to the establishment of the firm. Lastly he had made certain by personal canvass that the Bream and Mackenzie's pay-slips would be promptly honoured at their face value in the more prominent stores and saloons of Sawpits and Hampton—an arrangement indispensable where shantymen come long distances to get their money.

Mackenzie's greatest concern was for the recognition of the firm's probity.

Almost the first thing Bream did, after Mackenzie's return from Toronto, was to place an order with a large supply house for the heavy equipment he would need in the woods, such as stoves, cables, axes, saws, blocks, cant-hooks, peavies, crowbars, sledges, sleighs, cadgesleighs, pails, lanterns, harness, blacksmith tools, lamps, outfit for the wash-house, etc.

Now, several weeks later, when he received a telegram from this concern that the whole shipment was ready to move at his command, he had so manoeuvred that he was ready to act upon it. He wired back: "Ship to arrive Abimoming Ontario July 10th." This date allowed him ten days in which to conclude his remaining preparations.

Immediately, then, he bought his other supplies, huge quantities of food staples, winter feed for the horses, a medicine kit, mending materials, clothing, tobacco and matches for the "van," blankets for the bunks, playing-cards, and a few accordions for amusement. Practically all of these he secured in

Sawpits where were several large wholesale firms. And in this case, also, he gave orders to have the stuff shipped so that it would reach Abimoming on the tenth.

Then, on the ninth, with Dorlon, Borwell, and a first gang of forty men, he boarded the mixed train at Sawpits for the hundred mile trip north, this being but the first stage of their long journey to the Y. In a freight car next the engine were the company horses, creatures of special training and intelligence, mighty haulers and quick thinkers.

Abimoming, then the terminus of the Canadian Central's northernmost spur, was a new town but a growing one. Already two good-sized mills occupied opposite sides of the placid river that gave it its name, and a third was building. It was to insure the purchase of his timber by the owners of these mills that Bream took the trip. Already, he knew, they were sawing and shipping from near-by cuttings that bordered the B. & H. holdings on the west, but he could see that they must eventually look to the Y and the timber it controlled for the bulk of their business.

As the train bumped and jerked its slow way northward, Bream, studying his map, became more and more impressed with the mettle-testing quality of the task he had undertaken. The throat of the Y was more than fifty miles by airline north of Abimoming, and a full eighty by river. Across this territory, untravelled now except by surveyors and trappers, his supplies and equipment must be hauled.

One circumstance, however, was in his favour. Several years before, silver mining operations had been started just south of the Y and a tote road had been cut along the bank of the river as far as that camp.

Bream had been assured that, although the mine was now abandoned, the road was still usable. Beyond the mine it would be pioneering in virgin forest.

They reached the town that evening and put up at lumbermen's boarding-houses. Next morning they found that some of the expected supplies had already come, and while Bream interviewed the mill-owners regarding the purchase of timber, Dorlon and Borwell made ready for the long *trek* into the wilderness. The remaining equipment arrived on the noon train and the start was set for the following day.

The plan of the march was simple. All the teams but one, together with a third of the men under Dorlon, were to go north to the Y, select the camp-site, and commence the erection of the shacks. The remaining twenty-seven under Borwell, with one team to haul their cook outfit, were to follow more slowly, examining the channel of the river, and removing from it stumps, rocks, and other obstacles that might become formidable jam-builders during the drive of the ensuing spring. These tasks, it was calculated, would occupy each party a fortnight, by which time Bream expected that Mackenzie and himself could come north.

As he had hoped, he found no trouble at all in disposing of his timber at Abimoming. The mill-owners, including the one whose plant was building, bid separately on the ten million feet he guaranteed to deliver, and he finally signed contracts with Krug and Lableau at a figure that surprised even himself.

Thus, before he started back to Hampton, it was the fifteenth of July and the teams had come down to Abimoming for the second hauling of equipment. Reports of progress in the interior were encouraging.

The first evening of his return he called upon the

Mackenzies, although he had completed his business with Allan in the afternoon. He wanted to see Eloise. He had missed her while he was away, missed her gentle presence, her cheerful, spirited conversation,—the delightful influence of her personality on his life.

All through the late spring they had seen more and more of one another. Sometimes a matter of the firm's business took him to Mrs. Barry's of an evening, sometimes Allan's hearty invitation to a game of pinochle. Often it was merely his own inclination, given excuse by Eloise's bantering assertion that her debt-laden conscience demanded the discussion of some book she had read. And, as these evenings came to be more frequent and regular, Bream grew to anticipate them as the most pleasurable events in his life.

With a sort of rueful brotherly affection he envied Allan the companionship of Eloise, accusing him mentally of neglecting to bring out to the full the responsiveness of her nature. This was the first step in a gradually confirmed doubt as to the perfection of their relationship. The second came as his intimacy with them grew. He commenced to feel, inexplicably, that something definite and well understood intervened between them. He recalled the man's occasional wistful looks as he sought to please her, and the unintentionally revealed bleakness of the girl's eyes on certain days when her natural buoyancy seemed forced.

"What is it?" he asked himself. "Why aren't they perfectly happy? They have everything—youth, love, money, each other, and still . . . There is something that she can never forget. . . . It is her eyes that always show the pain. . . . And

his pleading . . . I wonder what it is. . . . I wonder!"

Now the heart of summer was upon them and the whole world laughed for joy of the warmth and comfort. The cold north winds had ceased and given place to breezes that fanned up from the east with warm showers tucked under their cloud-wings. The sun was hot and in the forest the balsam and pine gums oozed out like fragrant amber tears.

Insects were gone now as if a plague had swept them away, and folk rocked comfortably on their rickety piazzas far into the late twilight—sometimes until after nine o'clock. This was the nightly practice of Bream and the Mackenzies, and, while Dick and Eloise wrangled over what to them were the subtler aspects of music or letters, Allan buried himself in one of Bream's few scientific books or played Can-field. When darkness would put an end to his diversion he would sit silent for awhile listening to the conversation of the others, good-humouredly scornful, a trifle bored.

"Look here," he would interject occasionally, "what is the use of making such hard work of your pleasures? A lot of these writers never imagined half the artistic effects that people set down to them. If they did they'd be so self-conscious for fear they'd skip one that they wouldn't be able to write a word. Now this Meredith you were talking about just now. I don't know much about him, but I'll bet he is 'obscure' as they call it, because he never was exactly sure of what he wanted to say, or else he was mighty careless how he said it."

And then Bream, interested by the certain element of truth in the man's criticism, would endeavour to

draw him out further. But Allan would get to his feet yawning, call his wife a "school-marm," and invite Bream to go to the corner for a night-cap. Or he would ask concerning the practical handling of woods difficulties that his reading had suggested.

One night when he had departed on his regular pilgrimage alone, Bream turned to Eloise, laughing.

"He calls you a 'school-marm' enough in fun. I wonder whether he would like it in real life?"

"Mercy! I don't think so! But what makes you ask?"

"There's a vacancy in the village school here for next year and it has just occurred to me that perhaps you might like something to keep you occupied while Allan is away at the camp."

"What a splendid idea!" she cried. "I've often wondered about that myself. I shall perish if I don't have something to do here next winter." Her eyes lighted up mischievously. "And perhaps I could have a little bank account of my own by spring!"

"Not a very large one boarding 'round," he laughed. "But if you'd really like to try it I think it can be arranged. Dr. Cavanaugh has a good deal of influence in such matters."

"Oh, Dick, won't it be fun!" Some time since they had slipped naturally into the familiar address—"Imagine me presiding over all the urchins in Hampton! How soon can you know?"

"There's no hurry. It's early yet. Just spring the news on our cynical critic some time when he is in good humour, and if he gives his O. K. we will commence to pull wires at the other end."

During these busy weeks of launching their maiden

enterprise the partners worked in perfect harmony. A different field of endeavour had fallen naturally to each. While Bream was away looking after the larger interests Mackenzie remained at home disposing of the numerous secondary problems.

The final week before their departure was devoted to the clearing up of odds and ends. The inevitable last-moment list of overlooked supplies was ordered, and the second gang for the camp notified to be ready on the twenty-eighth. Reports from the West Branch told that all the preliminary force had arrived there safely and that the camp was almost completed. Everything appeared auspicious.

The last morning but two before the departure Bream left Mother McCracken's for the little "office" near the river some time after eight o'clock. He walked through the village briskly, intending to stop at the general store and post-office to inquire for any mail that might have arrived on the steamer the night before. As he entered the building he noticed Tommy Hill walking restlessly back and forth before the partition that shut off the village telephone and telegraph connection.

Making certain that there was no mail for him he had turned to go out when the lad approached him.

"Say, Mr. Bream," he said in a low confidential voice, "help a feller out, will ye?"

"Sure, if I can," assented Bream readily. "What's the trouble?"

"Gosh, enough! The old man's gone and made me work this summer—office-boy around that blame old mill. I ain't had no vacation. Why, Mr. Bream, I ain't even been fishin' since that time you was along an' here it is pretty near August."

"H'm! I'm beginning to see. Well, go on."

The boy held out a folded sheet of paper. "Send this telegram for me, will ye?" he asked. "Miss Jenks ain't showed up yet an' I don't know where she is. I got a date to go fishin' with the Doc an' I'm half an hour late already. Pa said this was important an' I don't dast go till I know she'll get it sure."

Bream took the paper. "Of course I'll send it," he said. "I'm in no special hurry. Run along."

The boy, transformed, leaped towards the door, his face radiant. "Gee! I won't fergit your doin' this!" he cried. "So long."

"So long," laughed Bream and watched him speed down the road, the dust spirting up under his bare feet.

As fate would have it, he had hardly disappeared when Miss Jenks entered the store. Bream gave her the telegram.

"Mr. Hill asked that this be sent off right away," he said, with the idea of covering Tommy's retreat.

He had almost reached the door on his way out when the frowsy, swarthy-skinned young woman called him back.

"I can't quite make this out," she said. "What's this Y mean? Would you mind readin' it?"

Startled by the familiar sound of the letter he took the message. It was addressed to Ezra Burchard and written in Tom Hill's almost illegible, childish scrawl.

"Can get half interest in Y for fifty thousand," he translated slowly. "Wire consent quick."

For an instant Bream stared blankly at the words. Then he read them again as if unable to register their meaning. Finally a sudden shock that was, as yet,

not fear, smote him. Uncertain, scenting danger, groping for the truth, he thought quickly.

"N-no w-wonder you couldn't make it out," he stammered with an unnatural laugh. "T-there is a mistake here." He turned again towards the door. "I'll take it back and have it made right."

"Thanks so much, Mr. Bream," tittered Miss Jenks. "Ain't it good I spoke!"

CHAPTER IX

OUT OF A THORN A ROSE

BREAM did not hear her. He had already left the store and was walking in a daze towards the "office," the telegram crushed in his hand. He was trying to think the unthinkable and making sorry work of it. "A half interest in the Y," said the message. Surely it was not *his* half interest. There was but one other—Mackenzie's. What, then, did this mean? A grotesque thought struck him. Had Mackenzie tried to sell him out? For a moment he felt as if he had insulted Allan to his face. Mackenzie sell him out? One of the best fellows that ever lived? The man who had leaped into the breach when he himself was in sorest need of help? Oh, no! Impossible!

But, who else could it be? his reason protested. They had their deed and title clear. No one could possibly have tricked them out of the land. It *must* be Mackenzie!

He stumbled across a street and turned in towards the little shanty where he and Allan met daily. The door was locked but he opened it and went inside for a look around. Both his desk and Allan's were untouched, everything was as it had been the night before. Evidently Allan had not yet come. He went outside, locked the door again, and, more by instinct than volition, pointed his steps towards Mrs. Barry's.

Why should Mackenzie want to sell him out? The endless questions began again. Why be party to such a deal as one thief would not turn on another? What had he, Bream, done that he deserved such treachery? His mind pounded over these problems almost in rhythm with his steps, now in accusation of Allan, now in his defence—a very battledore and shuttlecock of doubtful belief.

Unconvinced one way or the other, he reached Mrs. Barry's, his face livid but a smile on his lips. The Mackenzies were both there, Eloise on the porch, one arm twined round a pillar that supported the roof, Allan with one foot on the sidewalk and the other on the second step, looking up at her smiling, hat in hand.

For an instant the tableau burned itself on Bream's brain. Then it changed. Eloise straightened and Allan set the raised foot beside the other on the sidewalk.

"Hello, Dick," he called cheerily, "I was just coming down. Want to see me about anything?"

Bream saluted the girl. "Yes, for a minute," he said in a voice he hardly recognised as his own. "Will you come inside?"

"What's the matter, aren't you well, Dick?" asked the girl with quick concern as he mounted the steps. She had noted his ghastly pallor.

"Not quite up to the mark, I guess," he replied, just conscious of her question. "Heat, probably."

She started to follow them inside but Bream turned and spoke to her crisply. "If you please, Eloise, this is something between only Allan and myself." She shrank back, rebuffed, and, in the second that he looked at her, he saw a flicker of haunting fear supplant the

hurt in her eyes. Mackenzie, who had gone first, looked sharply around at his partner, as if sniffing suspicion. Then he proceeded into the bare living-room.

Bream, his nerves singing with tension, did not sit down as he held out to Mackenzie the crumpled message in his hand. "I've had ten minutes of hell over this paper," he said huskily, "read it and explain it if you can."

Mackenzie took the sheet, straightened it out and held it up to the light that streamed in the front windows. For a second or two he did not move. Not a muscle of his face twitched nor did he lose colour. "What does this mean?" he suddenly cried excitedly. "What does this mean? Who's done this? What has happened?"

"That's what I've come here to ask you, Allan," said Bream steadily. "God knows it can only mean one of two things. Either someone's made a fool of me or—or—forgive me if I say it, Allan!—either that or you've sold me out!" He took an impulsive step towards his partner. "Allan, look at me. Tell me you don't know anything about this! Tell me! Now!"

Mackenzie met the occasion superbly. He straightened his slim, aristocratic body, lifted his head, and turned his face towards Bream. But command his will as he might, his eyes would not quite meet Bream's. They looked above him, around him, at his forehead and at his chin, but they dared not cross that level, burning glance. "That's a damned insult!" he grated between clenched teeth.

Suddenly Bream knew. The realisation came to him easily, surely—an unshakable conviction. The

timbre of Mackenzie's voice rang false, his every motion advertised itself as that of an actor; his wavering eyes completed the betrayal. His carefully erected sham collapsed, and Bream knew!

For an instant he felt giddy, as if he were going to fall. Then his head cleared and, with realisation, his rage, a fearful, primitive thing, stirred in its dark prison beneath his sunny nature. His certainty of the other's guilt intensified with every moment, and to it was now added the angry shame at his own sickening gullibility. That growling, stirring, bestial thing far down in the depths of him reared and burst its bonds. His face contorted with diabolical fury.

"God damn you!" he roared thickly. "Insult, is it! You sold me out, you crooked cur! You know it, and I know it! Don't you lie to me!" He choked. "I could kill you where you stand, you vile whelp!" He took an involuntary step forward, and Mackenzie, blanched with fear, leaped back, knocking over a chair. This shrinking cowardice fed the blood-lust that raced through Bream's veins, but the fall of the chair roused him, sounded a warning note in his brain against the thing that was overpowering him. With his last ounce of resistance he fought the murderous impulse that would have hurled him, snarling, at the other's throat.

Mackenzie, fascinated, afraid to move, watched the atavic struggle the man endured with terrible fear, shrinking from the sight of those corded muscles, distended veins, and bloodshot eyes. He whimpered with horror and fright.

At last Bream, wet, white, and sick, sank into a chair, exhausted but the master of himself. For a long time he remained thus, his eyes closed. Then he roused.

"Sit down," he commanded weakly, and Mackenzie obeyed, his muscles tense, furtive, ready to leap. For a few moments there was silence while normal forces crept back through Bream's veins.

"What did you do it for?" he finally asked in a shaking voice that assumed Mackenzie's guilt, although the other had neither affirmed nor denied.

Mackenzie's glance, like his brain, darted back and forth with the rapidity of a snake's tongue. Then, because he was guilty and afraid, he chose the wiser course.

"I wanted to make money," he admitted sullenly.

"You could have made it if you had stuck by me."

"I wanted it quick, and I could make more."

"Yes, but you had to ruin me to do it!" Bream's voice rose sharply. "Damn it, what kind of a man are you?"

"Hill wanted the Y, didn't he?" defended Mackenzie.

"Yes, but not to work it with me! He hates me and you know it! W-why, you're not such a fool you can't see that! He wouldn't lift a finger to buy me out even, and you know I could never have swung the thing alone. You knew all these things and yet you sold me out. By God! I believe—" He looked quickly at the sullen grey face of his partner and saw it for the first time with understanding—read aright the significance of the large, almost feminine eyes, calculative when half-closed, the indefinite chin, the red, overfull lips.

Then, in a flash, certain unsuspected matters of the past eight weeks commenced to stand out clearly in a new light: why his ignorance concerning the newly arrived Mackenzies had given rise to Hill's sarcasm;

why husband and wife travelled through the wild as they did when railroads were near; the mythical "business" in the south that was so easily disposed of by wire and mail from Hampton; Allan's turn for the gaming tables; his rambling, indefinite account of his own life; and, lastly, his sudden, inexplicable eagerness to go into business with Bream.

He saw these things now without the gloss of graceful personality or mitigating circumstance. They were coherent and of a pattern; they built for him the character of a new Mackenzie. The malice aforethought in the selling out was clear as day. He saw himself as a dupe, a catspaw, a blind clown for a catch-penny juggler. The murderous fury stirred again deep down in him, but this time he controlled it ere it could break its bonds.

"So that's the kind you are, is it?" he cried. "A common, swindling thief, a shell-game man with a polish. Oh, I sucked the bait, I swallowed it whole all right. I see things now. . . . That partnership contract! Hell! What a farce that is! No option clause, no legal restraints, no jail in the background to keep us toeing the mark. I thought we were partners instead of cut-throats. It isn't worth the paper it's printed on!"

"Well, it could have been," retorted Mackenzie. "Why didn't you stand out for a clause providing for an option on my share? I couldn't have dickered with Hill. You'd have had me then!"

"*Had* you! Who wanted to have you?" Bream's voice rose angrily. "I don't do business that way, but by the eternal, I will after this. *Had* you! You had *me* in a corner that day I was mill-boss. I thought we couldn't fail, I was sure of success, I was sure of

you, and you took advantage of me, intending all the time to sell me out. It was smooth and slick and—" Suddenly, with the conviction of a revelation, an idea smote him and he leaped to his feet, glowering, menacing.

Mackenzie, startled, cowered back.

"I see it all now! *That's* why you hit the trail through this country. You're always on the getaway. They're after you; they're hounding you! And I'm just one you've done for!" He laughed in an ecstasy of scorn. "Oh, how easy honest men are! That mine last winter! How many did you do for then? And those ignorant Russian farmers and your fertiliser! Another swindle!" He smashed one fist down on the table so that Mackenzie leaped to his feet, livid. "Deny it, you dog!" he blazed out. "Deny you're wanted in every Province of the Dominion!"

Mackenzie swallowed convulsively and tried to speak, but no sound came from his parched lips.

"Pah! You can't! I know it. Now I've got you where I want you. You'll never ruin another man. I'll fix that, so help me!"

"Well, what are you going to do?" The question was sullen but frightened, fearful.

"Do! I'm going to turn you over to the people that want you. I'm going to send you to jail for the rest of your life."

"Oh no, Dick! Not that! For God's sake——"

"To jail I said," cried Bream, his voice rising. "It'll finish me but I'll do it. I'll settle accounts for all of us poor fools together, the whole turkey of us! I'll——"

The door leading into the hall opened slowly and Eloise, pale but fearless, stood framed there. One hand rested on the knob and the other was clenched

against her breast. She stood erect, her head held proudly high, her level gaze resting first upon one and then the other of the men.

Bream met her look with flashing eyes and knitted brows, resentful at her intrusion. Allan evaded it, bowing his head and looking at the floor. Only a little less keenly than she did he feel the pangs she suffered because of this crisis. Knowing what Bream's and Cavanaugh's friendship had meant to her, what pleasure the mere appearance of respectability had brought, he realised to the full her present anguish and despair. Venomously he cursed the twist of circumstance that had caused it. To have manipulated skilfully, smoothly; to have disappeared from Hampton without suspicion or incident while her friendships were at their ripest—that had been his hope. Now how utterly he had failed! Providence itself—had blundered.

"I overheard you, and I had to come in," she said faintly, her pale lips scarcely moving.

Bream bowed stiffly, afraid to trust his speech, chafing more and more at her presence in the scene. The girl turned to her husband.

"Allan, leave us, please," she begged. "I have something to say to Mr. Bream."

"I prefer him to stay here," said Bream shortly. "I don't propose to have him out of my sight. Until I'm rid of him for good."

"He will not run away," she replied quietly, meeting his hard gaze. "If he does I will stay here and take the responsibility for what he has done."

"If he does," repeated Bream savagely, "I'll follow him till I find him, and *this* time I'll kill him!" He drilled Mackenzie through and through.

"Go, Allan, please go," said the girl, and the other slunk away, closing the door after him.

When the sounds of his departing had ceased Dick turned to her. "What is it?" he asked. "Won't you sit down?"

She shook her head, twisting her fingers together until the joints showed white.

"I heard what you said," she burst out suddenly, and paused—"about sending him to jail. When I heard that I couldn't stay out any longer. I—" she broke off.

"Why did you come in at all?" he asked, more gently. "I wish you were not here. It will only hurt you to know about all this."

"Know about it!" She laughed with harsh suddenness, throwing one arm wide. "Don't you suppose I guessed what was the matter when you came this morning, after I've been dreading and expecting it for weeks?"

"You! Expecting this?" He gasped, unable for a moment to comprehend. "You, too—like him! Oh God!" The realisation of her words numbed him for a moment as if some part of him had been crushed by a physical weight. Then the hurt of it surged over him, almost unbearable, lashing him to anguished frenzy. He burst out between gritted teeth: "And you never warned me! You went on here day after day knowing what was in his mind, expecting the crash, and yet letting me go to ruin—playing me, dangling me, reading my books, acting a part until he was ready to spring the trap!"

He turned away from her suddenly only to whirl back. "You let him get me into this partnership farce, sat by that night knowing I was going to be

swindled, and did not lift a finger to prevent it! Two words and I would have known. A look, a motion, *anything*, and I would have suspected! But no. You let that criminal business go through, a willing partner in it. Great God! Is that the kind of woman you are? Is there no truth or honour left anywhere,—*even in you?* Faugh!" He turned away again, revolted.

White and haggard, the girl faced him.

"It isn't true, Dick! All that isn't true. I *can't* have you think it. I can't! I didn't *know*, but I was afraid—he had done it so often before."

"Ah!"

"But this time! I hoped. . . . He said he liked you so much, said there was honest money to be earned up there in the Y, swore he had no way to ruin you. But he lied to me as he has always done. And I was afraid all the time, oh, so afraid. . . . And that night you signed the partnership papers I was sick with fear. I went upstairs, I couldn't see it!"

"And yet you never warned me!" His voice was iron.

Her hands dropped loosely to her sides and she grew suddenly quiet, as if the passion had flowed from her finger tips. Once more her head lifted proudly, like that of a queen alone at the foot of a scaffold.

"Dick," she said gently, and met his glittering gaze, "I couldn't. He is my husband. Poor a thing as he is, he is that, and because he is, I couldn't. Oh, don't you see? I was bound, bound in my own honour. It is all I have left. Love and respect and happiness and illusion he has taken, but not that. That has brought me through these awful years, that and the knowledge that the inmost soul of me is my own to

keep good and true! How could I speak? How could I? I might as well have killed myself!"

Bream said nothing. The chaos of pain and disillusion in his mind ceased its clamour, and out of it streamed a faint, white light of vision, as dawn might have broken upon the young world. Such was the strength of his own innate rectitude, so clean his unsuspecting nature, that her desperate plea fell like balm upon his soul. It rang true with the highest demands of his ideal of woman, his ideal of her. Pride, self-respect, honour—these were the unshakable foundations upon which his admiration for her had risen. He understood now the impassable barrier that stood between herself and Allan. He lashed out with loathing rage at the man.

"Kill yourself!" he cried. "Rather kill him. If honour is so much to you, you dishonour yourself by living with him. But you shan't much longer, for he is going to pay for this and for everything. I'm going to jail him if it ruins me to do it!"

For a moment she was silent. Then she bowed her head.

"Oh," she cried piteously, "haven't I suffered enough without that! You don't know . . . Oh! . . ." She advanced a step towards him, her hands again clenched at her sides. "Listen, Dick! Try to understand! I've said I have lived in the north all my life." She spoke nervously, rapidly. "I have. My father and mother were missionaries at Moose factory on Hudson Bay—are yet. They sent me to England to school when they had taught me all they knew. I was educated, and I travelled, but I wouldn't stay abroad. I wanted to come home to the north, to the wild places. I did and was happy. Then

because the factor was a widower I grew to be the hostess at the post, though there were other women there older than I was. People said that the factor and I would marry, but that could never have been.

"Then, more than three years ago, Allan came. Just when the *brigades* were coming down and the trees were budding and there was spring everywhere. He was young and handsome. He fascinated me just as he fascinated you—as he fascinates everybody. For the first time in my life I loved a man, and inside a month we were married. My father married us. . . . Poor father! He doesn't know what I've been through since. We went away. I have never been back.

"I was happy for three months. Then, one night, Allan took me away quickly from some town. We were pursued. I discovered certain things and forced him to tell me the truth."

She paused and looked away, her lips quivering, her breast rising and falling fast. Bream averted his eyes.

In the kitchen Mrs. Barry, blissfully ignorant of the drama being enacted so near her, droned a hymn. The metallic whining of the saws at the mills came plainly to them through the open windows, a dominant note against which sounded the lesser noises of the summer day, the shouts of playing children, the shrill of a rooster, the creaking rattle of a springless wagon passing by, the tinkle of distant cow-bells.

"You don't know—you *can't* know what that truth cost me," she went on. "No man can. Only a woman who has seen her world go crashing could understand. . . . For a time I thought of leaving him, but the knowledge of my disgrace and the fear

of breaking those hearts that had loved me held me back. That, and something else—the same sense that refused to let me warn you against signing the partnership papers. In my heart marriage was sacred, a bond until the end, whatever life brought. That is why I have stayed with him, hoping always that, because he loved me, he would change. . . .

“Back and forth we’ve been driven across this country, living like outcasts, afraid to make friends, only settling down when Allan saw a chance to make money. And that’s been my existence!” She held out her hands in pleading. “And now,” her voice broke, “you want to put him in jail; you want to complete the ruin of my miserable life and send me back disgraced to those whom I thought would never know! Spare me that, Dick. We’ll do anything if you’ll only say you will. We’ll go away to-night. We’ll leave the money in the business and you can send it to me when you’ve made that much. If it’s lost, it is lost. It is what we deserve. Let us do this, let us do something, only don’t hurt me any more!”

Spent, she sank down into a chair and buried her face in her arms upon the ugly old centre-table.

Proud and queenly she was no longer. The pitiful humility of her voice, the weary lines of her relaxed body, betokened her utter abandonment of the too great struggle, the inevitable breaking of her spirit beneath its cruel burden.

Dick Bream, standing near the door where she had entered, looked down with swelling heart upon the lovely head that Mackenzie had brought so low. Gone was his anger now, except for a steadily burning hatred of Allan; gone his resentment against her, his misunderstanding, the memory of what had come

between them; gone everything but the thought of her. He saw the panorama of her life as she had painted it, the romance, the aspiration, the defeat, the black, hopeless outlook. How much she had suffered! he told himself, turning a bright, courageous face to the world, always sweet, always "playing the game" without complaint.

The pathos of the thing suddenly clutched him by the throat, stinging his eyes with tears, and a great wave of pity and tenderness swept over him. And in his heart was born a great yearning to take her in his arms and comfort her, to sweep her up and out of the wretchedness that was her life.

With tenderness came shame. He compared his own provocation with hers, and his murderous outburst with her long enduring. The hot colour crept up, burning his neck and face and throbbing hands. How unworthy he was even to stand in her presence, she who, through all, had kept the high vision and consciousness of self from tarnishment. . . . He was very humble, and felt himself looking far up at her as if, like the Blessed Damozel, she leaned out from the bar of Heaven.

And then, in the wonder and worship of her, the spark from the unsullied shrine of his heart leaped to the tinder of what had been their unsullied companionship, and love was accomplished in his soul.

Beautiful as a snowdrop out of the snow it came, beautiful as the first wild bird-song of spring, as the blush that steals across the grey of dawn. There was no violence, no tumult of passion. It was as if the miracle of creation had been suddenly repeated; where before there had been darkness and void, now there was beauty and glory, and a still exaltation that lifted

his soul to communion on a higher plane than he might ever touch again. The hour in his life for the one woman had struck.

Instinctively he turned away lest she should see his radiant face. Not yet had realisation come, bringing with it inevitable pain. He told himself vaguely that for the experience of this one moment all of life had been worth the living. . . .

Eloise lifted her head slowly from her cradling arms. Her eyes showed signs of tears but she was once more in command of herself—had taken up again her heart-breaking burden.

"What are you going to do—with us, Dick?" she asked.

Suddenly he dared not look at her, dared not speak, since eyes and voice and soul would shout aloud this ecstasy that flooded him. Yet speak he must for she was waiting. . . .

The sudden memory of his sharp, bitter words to her smote him. He saw himself as one who had heaped injustice on injury and cruelty on both. Oh, that he might blot his part in this from memory!

He turned to her impulsively.

"Forgive me!" he begged with deep contrition. "I've been a brute, I'm—I'm sorry."

She raised her eyes to his compassionate face and smiled wanly

"If *you* can ever forgive then we will think of my forgiveness. What are you going to do?"

His passion surged up in him wildly, but he retained his grip on himself.

"I—don't—know," he answered thickly, like a man who awakens from sleep. "Will you—keep him here until to-morrow?"

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"Yes," she said. "I promise."

"I'll tell you then," he cried, hardly knowing what he said, and made his way, dazed, from the house.

CHAPTER X

OUT OF A ROSE A THORN

ARRIVED at his unadorned, masculine room at Mother McCracken's, he sank into the patent rocker near the bed and mechanically fumbled for his pipe and tobacco. During the preoccupied, almost unconscious walk across town the first never-to-be-forgotten glory of his love-realisation faded, for, because we are earthy, we must return to earth though we wander ever so far towards the celestial. Now he commenced to see the truth and to feel the dull despairing ache that his vision brought him.

"So this is my romance!" his heart cried out. "For this I have kept myself clean, for this I have dreamed and planned and hoped all my life! . . . And now I am cut off—my love-life is ended before it has begun!"

There was no light-minded shrugging of the shoulders in Bream's regret. He knew that the one hour had struck and the one woman come, and that, however long he might live, there could be no other hour nor any other woman. A great, poignant bitterness that was a voiceless rebellion swelled within him, and he sat mute amid the blackening ruins of his life-long golden dream.

Vaguely he remembered that former time when he had sat here, the day he brought her down to Hamp-

ton. How much had happened since then! What a gamut of life experiences he had run! Partnership, business success, friendship, wreck, disillusion, love, despair—all these. Enough for two lifetimes, he muttered. Every thought of her now was coloured by some sweet or painful association. The books in the two narrow shelves above him had been their little world and were fragrant of her spirit because her hands had held them. He could not look, he could not think, without feeling the inextricable tangle of their two natures, turning, cleaving together like sturdy plants lending one another strength in the struggle upward. Now—the figure vaguely appealed to him—just as he had reached the sun he was cut off at the root and they had fallen apart.

"Ugh!" he cried in utter self-loathing, "what a selfish beast I am to sit here whining when she has been in a living hell for years! *Oh, Eloise, my sweet, my beloved!*"

At thought of her misery he writhed in physical and mental torture, grinding his teeth while wave after wave of black fury swept over him. "What can I do?" he groaned, "What can I do?"

He could not yet see his way clearly, for the drug of his passion was still strong in his senses. After a while his anger died out and his humble worship returned. Like a serf lifting love-heavy eyes to a passing princess, he looked up to his vision of her, and it strengthened him to bear his wretched part bravely before the world.

"How shall I be worthy of her if I cannot bear love for her sake?" he asked himself. And strength and high resolution flowed in through the channels of his soul, inspiring him to his hopeless task.

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To bear himself unflinchingly and honourably!

How simple to keep the spirit of honour. So long as he lived she should never suspect by look, word, or deed of his that he had ever loved her. In the contemplation and keeping of that resolution lay his salvation and both their honours. He should not fail.

But the letter of honour. What should he do now? How should he meet the situation that the knowledge of his love had precipitated? How unravel the net of emotions and desires that entangled him?

There was Mackenzie. Should he go scot free? His fury against the man stirred like a living thing. Never, he told himself. Then returned the thought of Eloise. *The letter of honour*. If he jailed Mackenzie would it not be revenging himself on her? Would not she, as usual, be the innocent, ultimate sufferer? There was no solution that way, since his great desire was to lighten her burdens, not increase them.

How then? Should he let them both go out of his life? With sublime indifference he overrode the vows his anger had wrung from him an hour before. If there was happiness for her that way they should go. He could put her out of his life. Just as sweet, should he never see her again, would be the memory of his one perfect moment; just as rare just as exalted. From that, Time, whatever it brought, could never take away one iota of glory. It had been ordained as his love experience; so it should remain.

Could he give her happiness in parting? His quick instinct negatived the question even as he repeated it. To send her forth again into the life that had brought her present misery would be a mockery, a refinement of torture. Truly there was little honour in that for any of them.

He found himself facing an insurmountable wall. He got to his feet and commenced pacing slowly up and down the room, his head bent, his eyes fixed unseeing upon the floor, his pipe clenched between his teeth. At last his ponderings reduced themselves to a single fact. Mackenzie was the insurmountable wall. What to do with him?

His mind slipped into a consideration of his financial and business dealings with the man. Did they offer a solution? The thought of the partnership made him bristle. He loathed the coupling of his name with Mackenzie's. The memory of their relations roused all his hurt bitterness.

He knew that he could still raise the loan at the Sawpits bank and could probably buy out Mackenzie. But that scheme led nowhere. It would merely release the latter from financial entanglements and leave him free to disappear as he pleased. And this was the last thing that Bream intended to bring about. To buy him out and turn him over to the authorities was equally impossible. Either way Eloise must suffer.

A long time he paced and pondered. His pipe went out but he did not notice it. The smell of cooking had commenced to permeate the house as noon approached, but he was oblivious of it as he was oblivious of the bright, hot sun that made oblong patches on the floor, or the sounds that came in through the open windows.

At last, between the rocks of unhappiness that existed for Eloise on either hand, he discovered a narrow tortuous channel of action. The girl should stay in Hampton during the winter and teach school as once they had laughingly proposed, and he would take upon himself the burden of Mackenzie.

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The partnership should stand—he writhed in momentary revolt—but under a new agreement that should bind Mackenzie hand and foot. Once in the virgin forest, a hundred miles from civilisation, the rascal's fangs would be drawn. Watched, unable to escape, he would be helpless. Then, thrown back perforce upon honesty, he would be forced to an honest effort or else risk the loss of all the little capital he had left in the world.

It was a bitter cup for Bream, but, with the thought of Eloise like sweet music in his heart, he lifted it almost eagerly to his lips. What the future might bring forth he did not know, did not try to fathom. The present bore sufficient heartache of its own.

The next morning, doubly resolved upon this course by reflection, he set off across the village to Mrs. Barry's. It was a perfect day with a brilliant, hot sun and a glowing blue sky in which long, light clouds like snowy fleeces hung stationary above the green hill-tops. It was a day to lift the heart with secret exultation and Bream's heart thrilled to the mood. Yesterday seemed a thousand years ago, the panic and passion of his discovery some eldritch, race-nightmare through which his love for Eloise sang clearly like a prescience of the divine. Life to him was sadder, but it was sweeter.

Bream waited, standing, in the little parlour while Mrs. Barry trudged upstairs to announce him. The place acted on him with an almost psychic force. He loathed it. So much had gone out of and come into his life in that room. It vibrated still with a hundred emotions. Some such pressure seemed to have exerted itself on Eloise's mind also, for, seeing him there as she came down the stairs, she exclaimed:

"Oh, let's not talk in that awful place! Let's get out into the sun."

By way of greeting the two men nodded briefly, Mackenzie's eyes falling before Bream's. Yet, as they took chairs on the porch, Bream thought that he appeared much his former self, cool, and indifferent.

Without a tremor Mackenzie cut to the heart of matters with his question: "Well, what do you mean to do?"

Bream explained, slowly, carefully, attributing his decision to different motives than those which had actually influenced him. He watched Mackenzie's face as he talked, and saw the colour creep back into it when he learned that he was once more to escape the punishment of the law.

After that first glance Allan did not once look at his whilom partner. His eyes rested either, absently, upon the cracked, paintless flooring of the porch or, wistfully, upon his wife's composed face. Despite his apparent self-possession he seemed alive to the effect upon her of Bream's every word. He observed her like a criminal studying his judge, scarcely interested in what went on around him except as it affected her. Only his eyes spoke, and this morning, as several times before, Bream found in them that yearning, wistful expression that betrayed Mackenzie's one strong emotion. In turn they expressed pleading, remorse, despair.

Curious, a little revolted, Bream studied this anomaly in the man's nature, this worshipping, dog-like affection that was the more intense because of its lack of conformity with his normal impulses. Knowing him aright now, Bream would have said that half the charm and comradeship he presented to the world was

based upon cold-blooded calculation and control. But not in the case of Eloise. He was blatantly genuine there, so much so that if he had not been abject, he would have been pitiful.

As for the girl, she shut the light of her face from her husband's starving eyes, not in punishment, but in shame. She could not look at him, although her solemn gaze lifted now and then to Bream's as he talked. To him she seemed an exquisite Fair Penitent, though, heaven knew, she had nothing to repent. Her lustrous, heavy hair was parted in the middle and swept back in graceful curves on either side. She wore a simple greyish-blue morning dress and this, with the sensitive sadness of her clearly chiselled features, seemed to intensify her twilight mood.

"This afternoon," Bream concluded, "I'll bring Joe Sturgis around here and we'll sign up some new partnership papers that I wrote out yesterday."

Eloise, scarcely believing she heard aright after the threats of the day before, studied his clear gaze silently for a moment.

"Oh, Dick!" she cried at last, overwhelmed. "You *are* good! It means you will take Allan back. . . ?"

Even Mackenzie's face showed an amazed expression for an instant. This sudden change of front puzzled him also, but he said nothing.

"On my own terms, yes." Bream turned to Mackenzie. "Your money is in the business and I want it to stay there. I'm not going to buy you out, because that would turn you loose on the country—something that will never happen so long as I live. Up in the woods there'll be plenty to do, and you will have to scratch like the rest of us if you don't want to go bankrupt. As a matter of fact you *can't* go bank-

rupt for I've fixed it in the papers so that if I find you trying to ruin me again I get your money and you have no come-back. The firm has *got* to make good if it's in human possibility.

"Now you, Eloise, will stay here in Hampton and teach school as we thought of once before. I have spoken to Dr. Cavanaugh about it and you can appear before the supervisors for examination any time you are ready. When we come down in the spring,—well, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it."

"What's this?" asked Mackenzie, suddenly, sitting erect. He had not spoken before during the interview. "Eloise stay here and teach school while I go up there in that God-forsaken hole for ten or eleven months?" His voice rose heatedly. "I won't do it! I won't be separated from my wife, the only thing in God's world I care for. I won't do it, I tell you! Either Eloise goes or I don't."

The quick, passionate defiance, something he had not suspected in Mackenzie, startled Bream. It was like the outbreak of savage, maternal instinct in some cowed animal. He paused a moment.

"Didn't you tell him about this?" he asked Eloise.

"No, I forgot," she said apologetically. "I meant to a dozen times."

Then the unreasonableness of the demand struck Bream. "Can't you see it's impossible for her to go with you?" he asked sharply. "She can't live all winter in a place like that!"

"Why not? She has done it before."

"But Allan," cried the girl, "not a lumber camp. With all those men— Don't you see I ought to stay down here?"

"No you oughtn't and I won't have it, that's all. Either you go or I don't go," he repeated.

Bream mastered an angry desire to override the man's selfishness, and reflected. Should Mackenzie persist he would face the alternatives either of turning him over to the authorities or of taking him by force, neither desirable courses. Unintentionally Mackenzie had disarmed him. Refusing to continue the argument further he rose.

"You have until this afternoon to settle this," he said with finality, "but there's one thing you needn't forget, Allan. Whatever Eloise does, you go up to the Y with me."

When he had gone Mackenzie turned to his wife.

"I don't know what's made Bream swing around like this since yesterday," he said with one of his quick changes to sullen command, "but I know I'm not going to have you hanging around here all winter. You know too much and there are too many people in this country that know who you are. Either you go with me or the game's up now. I'd sooner be alone in a real jail than condemned to hard labour up in that hell-hole with nobody but that slave-driver."

Eloise sat silent. After all, what did it matter where she was since this was all life held out to her? Better, perhaps, to freeze in a mud-chinked cabin than teach young urchins honour and truth and right. At least there was less irony in it. . . .

For a long time she tried to think, her mind stunned by the blows that had fallen upon it. Then, finally, she said: "Very well Allan, I'll go."

CHAPTER XI

TIMBER

"**TI-I-MBE-E-R!**"

The long, high-pitched call rang melodiously down the forest aisles until it faded away in the distance. Then there sounded a staccato *crack!* A number of men with axes who had been slashing in the brush drew off quickly to one side as the tall, straight spruce shivered almost humanly and began to move.

"All right, Bill," cried one of two men who stood on opposite sides of the trunk, a silver ribbon of saw between them. Bill unhooked his handle of the saw and the other drew the blade out with a metallic twang.

The almost imperceptible stirring of the tree changed, gradually, to a slow falling motion that had almost the appearance of control. The two sawyers backed away, their eyes gauging the direction of the imminent sweep downward. There came a swift crescendo of snapping and cracking and the sound of rending wood. As the top gathered speed there sounded a faint hissing that increased to a whistling rush of wind. Branches snapped, limbs from near-by trees were shorn away; there was a sense of breathlessness as if some cataclysm were about to occur.

Crash! A rending of second growth and under-

brush, a flash of naked, yellow wounds, a springy recoil from the earth, and the tree was down. Instantly the air was filled with dust and leaves and twigs, a murky cloud that settled slowly.

Pierre, lithe and cat-quick, leaped through the fog upon the prostrate body, and now his double-bitted axe lopped off limbs swiftly, surely, the steel glinting above his head. The other axemen moved forward again to their work of "swamping" or clearing a narrow travoy road down which to haul the logs.

Pierre worked with extraordinary speed and skill, swinging his axe from difficult angles and positions equally well with one or two hands, the implement seeming almost a part of his body. Presently, as if by the divesting of a garment, the tapering figure of the tree appeared, thus giving Bill and his companion opportunity for measuring the various log lengths.

"Ti-i-mbe-e-r!"

The call, musical and mellow with distance, seemed a sound of unreal beauty amid an orgy of destruction. From the right it came, then from the left, then ahead, always followed, a moment later, by the distant crash and thump of the shattering death.

The long saw in the hands of Bill's companion, having received its second handle, rasped cross-wise of the spruce dividing it into marked log lengths. Pierre, quick and dexterous, piled to one side the severed limbs and broken brush.

Then came Pat McCooey, prince of teamsters, bringing chains and tongs, and riding on a little sledge behind Peter, his big white horse. With many a "Yo!" and much clanking of cant-hooks the butt end of the nearest log was rolled and made fast upon the little sledge, and Pat, standing bravely on high, like a

skipper on his bridge, urged Peter skilfully down the winding travoy road towards the skidway.

Bill and his partner moved forward to the next spruce, passing several large pines which would be cut later, and other conifers below cutting size. By common knowledge spruce and balsam fell first for, being full of sap and floating heavily, they needed longer to dry out in the open air.

Pierre, with swift accurate strokes, notched the bark of the new victim at the proper height and the sawyers, oiling their blade with kerosene, cut into the fresh wound. Presently, when the back of the saw had disappeared, they paused in their steady swinging back and forth and thrust iron wedges into the slit, thus holding the tree up from the blade and giving it free play.

At last, "Timber!" came the cry, the spruce fell, and the circle of cutting had been completed again.

In the little clearings the sun beat down warmly, distilling the fragrance of the fresh-cut boughs and wet yellow chips. In the untouched reaches it filtered through the dark tree-tops, mottling the hazel and tamarack and tangled berry bushes and glinting now and then from the back of some flickering bird. In the deeper recesses where the cutting was inaudible primeval quiet reigned, quiet broken only by the snap of a twig or the rustle of some invisible creature, the saucy chatter of a squirrel or an outbreak in some feathered family. September lingered pleasant and sunny as though summer were loath to draw in her outposts of warmth for the retreat south.

Presently there sounded a loud, steady crashing and swish of underbrush accompanied by human voices in discussion, and two men broke through a

hazel thicket into a natural clearing. One was tall and broad-shouldered, a man of great strength, while the other though of good height was more slim, almost dapper looking. Both were dressed for the woods in flannel shirts, felt hats, "stagged" trousers, and high, heavy boots.

Arrived in the clearing the large man glanced about him as if seeking familiar signs and then halted the other.

"This is the place, Allan," he said. "You can see the blaze-marks I made last spring. This should be the end of the logging road from the West Branch. Another year and we'll drive it diagonally down again to the East Branch. Like this." He drew pencil and note-book from his pocket and sketched roughly. "The Y is a triangle pointed head downward, and our logging roads will make another triangle pointed head up into the Y. Over here a little to the west of the centre is the camp."

"H'm, the boys missed the middle a little when they built, didn't they?"

"Yes, but not much. It is near enough so that we can cut for both branches from it." He touched up his sketch by adding many twisting lines leading into the logging road.

"These here are the travoy roads," he explained, "and lead to the skidways or places where the logs are piled alongside the main road. When the snow comes we'll break up the skidways and haul the logs to the river."

Mackenzie was silent for a minute.

"Considerable job, all told, isn't it?" he said drily.

"Yes, but it's a *great* job," cried Bream, his voice ringing though his face did not change. "It's the

kind of a job that will make us or break us. We're in for a fight here that will go to a finish. It's all a question of whether Nature gets us or we get Nature."

A faint colour stole into Mackenzie's face as he said: "Well, she'll have to go some to put us on the mat!"

Bream looked quickly at his "partner" as if he had not heard aright. This was the first flicker of interest in the business that Allan had displayed since coming to the woods the month before, and Bream wondered if his sullen indifference had broken at last. The emphasis on the "us" seemed to imply an awakening concern in his enforced partnership.

"We're *bound* to win if we know we can't be beaten," said Bream with conviction, "and I, for one, know we can't. By Heaven, I *won't* be!"

"Well, if you feel that way about it I guess you won't," growled Mackenzie, suddenly stirred by the other's combative assurance. "Let's go back."

Without a word Bream turned and took the almost invisible trail, Allan following him.

It had been a hard month for Dick, a month of work-filled days and half-sleepless nights over which Mackenzie had hovered darkly, a *bête noire* to thought and sight. Sullen, stolid, icily indifferent, he had come into the Y with Eloise and taken up his new life like a prisoner, dully, and full of hatred. So far he had not done an hour's work in the interests of the firm nor had he given the slightest indication that he intended doing one. Hatefully acquiescent to Bream's every suggestion, he had accompanied him on proposed tours of inspection or exploration only to keep up the illusion of partnership before the men. With them, as usual, he was on friendly terms.

Faced with this spirit Bream refused to yield an

inch from his intention. He had not a thought in his mind of Mackenzie as a partner except in so far as concerned the spending of the firm's resources. He considered him an utterly impossible associate from all standpoints, yet scarcely allowed him out of his sight. He had made his vow and he intended to keep it.

Of all this Mackenzie suspected nothing. In dealing with him Bream assumed a crisp, business-like manner and address that was tinged with friendliness and consideration, but never overstepped a certain mark of reserve. He consulted Mackenzie in all matters pertaining to the firm and the work, and maintained scrupulously before the men the air of harmonious partnership. In this Mackenzie's pride abetted him.

In Bream's mind the past was like a closed book, except for the one perfect page that had fluttered against his heart and clung there. His was not a nature that rehearsed and cherished the evil he had suffered in mind or body from the hands of others. He lived too much in the present and future to grow morbid over the unhappinesses of the past, and he had put Mackenzie out of his life as much as constant proximity would permit.

Yet often, despite this strength of purpose and resolution, doubt would assail him and he would ask himself how long he could endure the strain. Sometimes he feared that Mackenzie's weak spirit had been utterly broken by those terrible days at Hampton, and wondered how it would all end. But in this, Eloise, one day quite by accident, comforted him.

"Have patience," she counselled. "I think this is the temper of a spoiled child."

Bream had had patience, inexhaustible patience,

and yet, until to-day, Mackenzie had not varied his attitude by the width of an eyelash. Bream grasped at the faint sign like a drowning man at a straw.

After five minutes hard going through the tangle, over windfallen trees and across rough gullies, the two broke suddenly upon a gang, engaged with a team, in building the last furlong of logging road. The men, variously at work clearing brush, felling trees, stumping, or grading, looked up and nodded to the partners, while the lumberjack in charge, an elderly man, stepped up for a word.

In the presence of work Bream became another being. His eyes observed every detail with lightning rapidity, there was an uncompromising set to his mouth, he spoke bruskiy and with very few words. Now for half a minute he estimated the progress of the present job, taking into consideration the fact that the road must be almost as smooth and level as a boulevard.

"Fine-looking road, Joe," he said, "but not enough of it done. Anything the matter?" It was smiling criticism but required unequivocal satisfaction.

Joe wiped his forehead with his red bandana and took a fresh chew of "black strap."

"One or two of the boys says the axes ain't quite what they ought to be," he replied with blunt honesty.

"Who says so?"

Joe indicated a young fellow who was grubbing in the brush to the side of the road. Bream walked over to him.

"What's the matter, Jules, your axe no good?"

"Yeh, no good." The French Canadian, his face flushed, stood sullenly studying the ground.

"Let's see it." Bream took the instrument from

the other and examined it. "You've been trying to chop out rocks with it," he stated, noting the nicked edge. Then, looking again at the other's face, he immediately saw where the trouble lay and his eyes hardened.

"Where's the whiskey you've got?" he asked bruskiy.

"Whiskey? I no have any."

"Oh, yes you have," Bream insisted, still pleasantly. "Give it to me."

For an instant Jules met the unwavering glance that pierced him, then slowly produced the flask from his hip pocket. Bream took it and smashed it on a rock at the edge of the road.

"Go into camp and Barry will give you your time," he said. "You've worked for me before and you know my rules. You've disobeyed them and I don't want you here."

The man's face darkened with rebellion, but another glance at the inflexible, waiting boss cooled him. He turned away down the road. Bream watched him a moment and then spoke to the others.

"What's the matter here, boys?" he asked crisply. "You don't want Joe's gang to be called the soldiers in the camp, do you? This isn't the kind of work you do for me. I realise this is a dirty job but the faster you move the sooner it will be over."

"All right, boss, we're on," said one of the men and spat copiously on his hands.

Bream grinned. "Let it go at that, boys," he said and turned down the road, Mackenzie following.

For a while they walked in silence. Then the latter cleared his throat.

"Look here," he said, "I'm supposed to be a partner in this business but I don't know the first thing about

the work. Already I've had some of the men ask me questions I couldn't answer and I think that's bad for everybody concerned. Now that we're one hand short what do you think of my getting out with an axe with that road-making gang to-morrow?"

For a few minutes Bream did not speak. The surrender had come so suddenly that he could not formulate a reply. Its first effect on him was one of inexpressible relief, but this he could not express.

"You don't think it would hurt discipline to have one of the owners working with the men?" he parried.

"You do it," was the reply. "You can do more than any man in camp."

"That's why I work with them sometimes."

"I see," said Mackenzie reflectively. "You mean I'll have to do the same?"

"Not necessarily with your muscle," replied Bream, thinking of the other's slighter build. "You have the advantage of brains over most of these men and there is where you can prove your superiority. That's what gave me my start."

"I see. I hadn't thought of that. I think I'll do it."

"It will be a big help," admitted Bream, and the subject was dropped.

An eighth of a mile from where the gang was working the road turned sharply to the right, passed between projecting rocks, and without warning revealed the camp, a cluster of rough log shacks in a flat oval, two hundred yards long and a hundred wide. On both sides heavily wooded hills rose quickly to a height of three hundred feet, closing in at each end to the width of the logging road.

The buildings, ten in number, and of varying sizes,

stood at the sides of the road, seven to the left and three to the right. They were constructed entirely of birch logs and, owing to the fact that here and there the banded bark had peeled away, there was an effect at a little distance of alternate silver and gold. The yawning chinks in the walls had been effectually closed by driving narrow wedges of wood between the logs and daubing the remaining apertures with cement plaster. The roofs, supported in each case by a huge tree for a ridge-pole, were covered with black roofing paper. Very dirty square, ill-fitted windows, divided into four panes, peered from the walls like white-rimmed eyes, and a stove-pipe protruded above every roof.

As Bream and Mackenzie entered the camp an old bent man hobbled out of the stable an empty pail in each hand. His face was deeply graven and his eyes bleary, but a Roman nose and straight forehead gave him an indefinable look of distinction.

"Well, Jimmie," said Bream, "how are Lil and Lazy?"

"Coming on finely, thank you, Mr. Bream," replied the other in startlingly good English. "They should be able to go to work by the day after tomorrow at the latest."

"Thank you, Jimmie."

"Not at all, Mr. Bream, not at all." He passed on with the air of one who had done a favour.

"Funny old boy," mused Mackenzie. "Notice the 'side' of him? You'd think he had hired you instead of his having to chore around camp like a cook's helper."

"Yes, poor devil, but I always let him think so. He taught at Eton once and this is where drink has landed

him. If you feel like mental gymnastics some dull day tackle Jimmie and get a surprise."

A long-drawn girlish halloo reached their ears and out from a little cabin near the north end of the camp Eloise came running to meet them. Now, as on the day Bream had seen her first, she was dressed in yellow buckskin, soft and fine as chamois, a material that clung gently to her figure. A fringe of porcupine quills, dyed blue, clicked and moved about her neck, and similar ornaments at her wrists, many-hued, gave a touch of colour. She came towards them looking like some native creature of the forests, walking silently with long, graceful strides in her moccasin-soled oil tans.

"Oh, to be a boss!" she cried gaily, "and stop work in the middle of the afternoon!"

"Listen to that, Dick," said Allan with a sudden return to his old-time friendliness. "I wonder who is the boss of this camp, eh?"

"Yes," said Bream, his eye twinkling upon Eloise. "I *wonder* who is."

"Oh, well, now—" protested that young lady aggrievedly, "you're both conspiring against me, and—and making fun of me, for all my good works. I shall tell the cook!"

"Then we might as well give up first as last," grinned Allan, slipping his arm around her.

"And what has come over you, my lord," she asked him bluntly, "that you are in these unwonted spirits?"

"I'm going to work to-morrow," he told her, "with an axe in a road-making gang. What do you think of that?"

Taken aback, she stared at him in silent surprise for a moment. Then, seeing he was serious, she met his mood.

"I think it is splendid," she said. "I'm so glad." A little later she turned to Dick. "By the way, one of the men just went in to see Barry. Is he quitting?"

"Fired," was the laconic reply. "Been drinking whiskey all day."

"And I'm taking his place," put in Allan. "I figured I couldn't be much of a boss here until I learned a little of the business."

A lightning glance of understanding and relief that said: "At last!" passed between Bream and the girl.

Both of them had been under a great strain and for her sake he was doubly glad that this had come.

They walked towards the north end of the camp, passing the blacksmith's shop with its glowing forge and the shack where the teamsters slept apart from the other men. Next came the long, low combination bunk-house, dining-room, and kitchen and opposite to it the storehouse. Beyond, in a group, were the wash-house, office, and the little one-room shack that the Mackenzies occupied.

The cook, Pete Rolfe, a gaunt, loose-hung young man with a drawl whose vaulting ambition was to become a dentist, leaned against the door-frame of his sanctum and inquired as to the defection of Jules. His air of easy familiarity symbolised the exalted nature of his position in camp. Bream divulged the few details briefly and then entered the office where a warring of loud voices had already proclaimed that the Canuck was in the process of getting his "time."

CHAPTER XII

THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD

AT sunset the men tramped in from the woods, dirty, weary, and famished. With them came the big horses, clumping heavily, chains clinking along the ground behind them. While the teamsters turned into the stable, the saw-gangs, swampers, and road-makers continued on to the bunk-house where they turned over their huge dinner baskets to the cookee before washing up. There was, then, a pleasant sound of water and, presently, with hair plastered and hands partially scoured, they sat about on the pile of *chicos* outside the kitchen awaiting the appearance of the cook and his clanging bell. Upon the first note they rose as a man and moved silently through the door to their places at the long trestle tables.

The dining-room was the middle division of the largest building in camp. The bunk-house opened into it from the lower end, the kitchen from the upper. It was log-raftered and walled and contained, besides the three long tables, a stove at one end upon which part of the cooking was done. Above this stove, on nails in the wall, all manner of copper and tin utensils gleamed dully.

The tables were two planks wide and covered with oil cloth that glistened in the weak yellow light shed

down by suspended lanterns. Now they groaned beneath mountains of bread, smoking meat, beans, and canned vegetables distributed prodigally along their lengths. Yellow bottles of mustard or other mighty condiments lifted metal tops above the hillocks of food, and what room the staples did not use was occupied by tins of fresh pies, cakes, cookies, and pots of tea. The benches were backless and half a foot wide.

At each man's place was a granite plate, a granite tea basin, and a steel knife, fork, and spoon. These dishes and utensils constituted the unvarying equipment of the evening meal however many courses a man chose to eat. As it was the fork was practically superfluous, only being required now and then to pin down a refractory piece of meat.

The men took their places with a shuffling of feet, a creaking of wood, and the extinction of what terse conversations had been under way. There followed then a continuous and uninterrupted clatter and scrape, a champing of jaws, and smacking of lips; stertorous breathings only interrupted by an occasional "Pass the beans." "Tea, cookee!" "Pie, please," launched in the direction of the man nearest the article.

Talk, except of this order, languished, for when a man works like an animal he feeds like one, and the amenities come with a full stomach. So now, crouched over, with elbows out, eyes fixed, and beards and chins wagging, these conquerors of Nature took their fill.

Up and down behind them, Pete Rolfe and his young assistants moved ceaselessly, answering a call here, anticipating one there, expediting the consumption of fuel by the human engine.

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For twenty minutes the world ceased to be for these men. Then, here and there, one rose with a sigh, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and reaching for his plug and pipe. In five minutes they were leaving through the bunk-house door in twos and threes, and in ten the place was clear.

Then, while the cookees set several places afresh, the cook clanged his bell a second time, and the aristocracy entered: Bream, Barry, and the Mackenzies. With naïf equality the cook sat down with them, but the cookees carried their heaped plates to another table.

For Eloise there were thick china and plated silver set out always by Rolfe personally, this being but one of his efforts in her behalf. Another, more difficult, was his attempt at the proper mastery of a fork, he having been assured by her, upon inquiry, that this was an accomplishment common to dentists.

To-night she was gay for the first time since coming north, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks brilliant. And Bream, studying her, told himself that this was reaction—her relief at Allan's surrender bubbling up in excitement.

"We're going to have a musical to-night," she announced suddenly, stirring the cup of tea she had sweetened with brown sugar.

"Not that jew's-harp fellow again?" protested Allan seriously.

"No, dear, a virtuoso this time, Edward O'Duffy and his accordion. He has promised to teach me to play if I like it."

"H'm!" said Bream accusingly, "I see now why you have mended the poor chap's gloves and socks and things so earnestly. I've watched you bristling with

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curiosity over that accordion every time the boys have had a dance in the bunk-house. And now you're going to see it for yourself! Well! well!"

"And didn't you have to bribe the jew's-harp player by writing a letter home or something before he brought his instrument of torture round?" inquired Allan.

Barry, the clerk and scaler, a little timid man with grey hair and iron-bowed spectacles, no sense of humour, and not the slightest conception of all this fooling, set the blundering heel of fact upon the flower of fancy.

"Yes'm, pardon me, ma'am, you did write that letter, Mrs. Mackenzie," he said seriously. "I remember it plain because Bert come an' bought the stamp off me 'bout five o'clock in the evenin' a week ago Sunday."

"Why, so I did, now that you call it to mind, Mr. Barry," said Eloise, careful of the little man's feelings. "Thank you so much. Bert's jew's-harp was jolly."

"If you aren't careful, mothering these big brutes," remarked Bream with an amused grin, "they'll get up a comb band and hold rehearsals when they ought to be cutting timber. You mustn't spoil them."

At which Eloise called upon Pete Rolfe for protection and brought an incongruous blush to the tanned cheek of that willing champion.

Bream had spent an evening in the Mackenzie cabin but three times during the past month, each occasion being one of policy. For his part Allan had often joined the long, rambling talks in the office with which the camp leaders passed the evenings.

To-night he urged Bream's presence in the cabin while O'Duffy played, a friendly advance with a

flavour of the old Hampton days. His resolution to work seemed to have brought back his spirits. For the first time he laughed and displayed some of the charm that was native in him. All but Bream were captivated. For him the tone of the bell rang as false as ever, and he was convinced that it always would.

The Mackenzie cabin was like all the others except that it was more snugly and carefully built. It consisted of one large room, some twenty feet square, with one door and one window in front and two windows on each side. It was the only shack with an attempt at a ceiling. A squat, round stove occupied the exact centre of it, and the two bunks and wardrobe built against the back wall had been curtained off.

"Deacon seat" benches, chairs made from stumps and half-barrels, and a solid pine table holding a lamp completed the furniture. Two other small lamps hung in brackets one on each side of the room.

Up to this point matter-of-fact man had been responsible. Now ingenious woman stepped in. On wires strung above the window frames Eloise had hung white curtains, tied back with red ribbons. Against one wall was a shelf upon which stood a dozen books, most of them Bream's, a few her own. Coloured pictures, cut from magazines and framed in cambric-covered cardboard, were tacked up here and there. A work-bag, bulging with male apparel, hung on a nail behind the door. A kettle whined on the top of the stove and tea-things could be seen on another shelf. The table bore a pile of out-of-date magazines, writing materials, and photographs of Eloise's parents preserved in worn, red morocco frames.

Plain and rough as everything was, her touch and personality were everywhere evident. One felt in-

stinctively on entering that thought and care had been lavished here for very love of doing. . . .

As might be expected under the circumstances, Edward O'Duffy came for his formal performance abashed and unnerved. Whereas in the company of his own he could stir the brogans of the dead, here he blundered and sweated and made such a job of things that Bream finally interposed to save him.

"You're rotten, Ed!" he remarked disgustedly. "You ought to be thrown in the river. Get out!"

And the wretched lumberjack, thankful for this dismissal, backed towards the door.

"The bhoys wanted me to sa-ay," he announced timorously, his hand on the latch, "that there's a game of bean-bags in the bunk-house the night."

"Oh, there is, eh?" said Mackenzie, his face lighting up with interest. "Tell them I'll be over."

"Yis, sor," and O'Duffy disappeared.

"Bean-bags?" inquired Eloise wrinkling her forehead.

"Yes, so to speak," explained Bream. "Poker with beans from a sack as chips, each worth a plug of tobacco."

"Like the goat-meat hunters bring in when it is the closed season for deer," supplemented Mackenzie, drolly, rising. "I'll be back in an hour, Dick. Amuse Eloise, will you?"

"If it's possible after the collapse of her musical."

"I don't know that it is," she sniffed, pouting, and added as an afterthought, "Unless you let me beat you at checkers."

"I'll try," Bream answered so humbly that they all laughed. . . .

Except for a few minutes now and then in the

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daytime Bream had not been alone with Eloise since coming to the Y, and he had blessed this circumstance, for it had made the task he had set himself regarding her much easier.

Yet not one moment of his waking hours had love left him. Every action, every thought seemed coloured by it. The bright, blue, sunny days tingled with the joy of it; the gloom of twilight and the regret for summer's passing were full of its sweet melancholy. The realisation, gentle and holy, fed upon itself—a steady flame upon a sacrificial altar; a vestal flame that needed no tending lest it die out.

Now Mackenzie, in his desire to make amends for the past month, was forcing things back upon their old footing of free-and-easy comradeship, a footing dangerous and difficult for Bream with regard to the girl; a footing he had no desire to regain with regard to the man.

The action was typical of Allan's character. Selfish, seemingly unaware of the finer distinctions of feeling, he imagined that now that he had admitted the untenability of his attitude, everything would go on swimmingly as it had before.

"What happened to Allan to-day?"

Eloise advanced the left red man in her first row in the approved manner of checker attack.

Bream told her, at the same time duplicating the move with his black.

"I'm glad; things will be better now."

"I hope so. I want to see how long this enthusiasm for work lasts before I make any predictions."

"Jump, Dick, you've got to jump."

"Oh, by George, I'd forgotten." With a loud groan he obeyed and laid himself open to a loss of

two men which were triumphantly captured. "Why can't I see more than a move ahead!" he growled ferociously.

"Now that he has changed I think Allan will do his share," she said gravely. "You have been good and patient with him, Dick."

"Oh, no." He laughed lightly and riveted his attention upon his pieces. "I've been too busy to indulge in any of the Christian virtues, I assure you. Ah, now, *you* must jump . . . Oh heavens! Where are my brains? Three! This isn't a defeat, it's a rout."

"King, please," she crowed. "Wait till *he* gets out among your Africans."

A rising wind swept roaring through the trees on the enclosing hills, making more cosy by contrast the crackling wood-fire in the round-bellied stove. A great shout and laughter from the bunk-house indicated a *coup* at "bean-bags." An occasional rattle of utensils or bang of a bread-box cover told that the kitchen force was packing the dinner baskets for the morning.

For a few minutes they played in silence, Bream contriving to make a villainous move now and then calculated to establish the genuineness of his efforts.

"Do you know," she said impulsively, "I think I am going to be happy here this winter, happier than I have been for a long, long time."

Bream left his single black king to the mercy of surrounding red foes and looked at her quizzically.

"Do *you* know," he said slowly after a moment, "that, in spite of everything, I can never think of you as unhappy. It must be something you surround yourself with, an atmosphere you create, that gives me

that impression. Whatever it is, I am glad you expect to be genuinely happy here for that relieves my conscience. I've been wanting for a long time to apologise for dragging you off to this hole when you might now be fairly comfortable in Hampton teaching urchins." He laughed and absently moved his Rex into a "pair of breeches."

"Please believe that I don't regret the urchins one bit," she said. "I think perhaps some of these men need me more than they do, if it comes to that."

"They worship you already," he said gently.

"I'm glad, but after all that's not the real reason I'm happy. . . . Oh, how can I explain so you will understand! . . . Can you imagine what it is to me to *know* that at last I can live among other people without shame? That *he* is helpless? That I am free from the awful dread and suspicion that hung over me day and night before? Can you conceive what this—" she looked about the rough room—"means to me? The first real home I have had in years? A home that I'm not afraid to live in? . . . *Now* do you see why I'm going to be happy?"

With hands clasped in her lap she questioned him passionately, her eyes eager for understanding, her lips parted. Forgotten was the merry and triumphant campaign on the checker-board.

Bream shut his teeth and clenched them. Every word she spoke, every action, stirred the flame in him. He had not realised that she could make it quite so hard. . . . Was it that he had overestimated his strength or that he had underestimated her effect on him? Angered at his weakness he ground down the words that rose to his lips, grim determination settling upon his face.

"Yes, I see," he replied gruffly. "I'm glad you can be happy. You've certainly earned a little happiness."

She looked at him quickly, drawn by the tone of his voice, intuitively aware that some change had come over him. She saw the shadow on his averted face, and her own slowly lost its girlish, eager brilliance. She remembered her words, impulsive, almost intimate; words that for them both had raised up images of the past crisis. And a thought came to her vaguely that perhaps she had blundered, had assumed too much—that never again could he be quite the same with her, just as he never could be the same with Allan.

Still, even so, there was a duty to be done, a duty due both to him and to herself. He must know that she had not been blind then, though she had been dumb. Hesitatingly she said:

"I want you to know, Dick, that I owe my—this happiness to you. Because the—the other punishment would have broken my heart, you brought Allan up here. Don't think I didn't know. Just to say I am—grateful, well, it could never tell how grateful I am."

He raised his hand abruptly to stop her, but she went on as if she had not seen: "That—that was something; it helped in a sort of physical way, but it wasn't all . . . I was sick then, sick inside—in my soul. Can you understand? And just to know that a man lived who would do that—for me—*then!* . . . It brought me back from the Valley, Dick. That is why I am happy. And I am happier, now that you know."

"Don't! Please don't!" he pleaded tensely, turn-

ing swiftly towards her. Then with an effort, he mastered the feeling in his voice and assumed a lighter tone. "Really, you will spoil me as badly as you do the rest of the boys if I don't take care. I deeply appreciate what you have said"—(the flat banality sounded oppressive),—"and I ask nothing more than to—Oh, thunder!" Shifting in his chair, as his nervous tension relaxed, one of his knees, upon which half the checker-board rested, twitched violently. In an instant disaster followed. Kings were uncrowned and their followers, as though dismayed by the fact, tobogganed ignobly from their places in inextricable confusion. Eloise completed the rout with a sudden movement to check it. They looked at one another for a moment in dismay and then suddenly burst out laughing like children.

"Just when I was winning!" she cried reproachfully. "You just *wouldn't* let a woman beat you."

"Apparently I am the peak of perversity," he admitted, "but truly I couldn't help it. My guardian angel must have nudged me at the psychological moment."

"Well," she said rising, "if you will collect the fallen warriors I will make some tea. And, even if you were ungallant, perhaps I'll give you some jam."

He groped about under the table, calling attention to his unparalleled industry, and demanding jam in proportion.

Afterward he went over to the kitchen and "hooked" a pie in quite the approved manner.

When all was ready Eloise looked at the clock.

"It's past the hour. I wonder if Allan is coming?"

"Let's wait a few minutes anyway."

They waited, and presently Mackenzie arrived

flushed, excited, and visibly brightened by the possession of a handful of navy beans. He joined the others bursting with the details of the game.

"By George, those shantymen know a little about a poker hand, Dick! And there's no reading them either. Secretive as clams. I tried bluffing on a pair of aces once and that jew's-harp fellow—McGee—trimmed me to the Queen's taste. After that I was careful. Um! Good pie, this. Pass the sugar please, Dick. But the best pot I landed was on a straight flush. Borwell opened and three of us were in, he and I and Bill, one of the sawyers. Borwell thought he'd had enough in about a minute and dropped out, but Bill stuck. I knew he must have something pretty good because he borrowed to back it, and yet I knew he would have to show four aces or a royal to take the money. Well, sir, we raised it about as high as the roof and everybody in the bunk-house got interested. Men got out of bed to see the finish. And what do you think was the show-down? We both had straights, Jacks up, only mine was diamonds and his spades. You ought to have heard the yell that went up when the boys saw what had happened! Poor Bill won't smoke for a year."

"I think we did hear it," said Bream with polite interest, unconsciously feeling the intrusion of a new atmosphere. Then he rose, looking at his watch. "Half-past nine. This is awful. I must be going."

"By the way, Dick, I told Joe I would be in his gang to-morrow."

"All right. I'll happen around about ten o'clock to see how you're getting on. But take my advice and be careful. Don't be ambitious till you learn to use your axe. A cut foot or leg may lame you for life."

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"Trust me, Dick. Recklessness is poor economy, especially when you are one of the owners. Well, good-night."

Bream closed the door after him and bent forward against the boisterous wind that swept through the little camp. He walked about quickly from building to building, satisfying himself that all was safe, a self-imposed nightly habit remaining over from his days in the B. & H. camps.

At last he turned towards the office—in which he slept—and, as he lifted his hand to the latch, his eyes unconsciously sought out the Mackenzie cabin. The front window had not yet been darkened by the buckskin curtain and it glowed, a yellow square against the darkness, throwing a rectangle of gold upon the ground. Through it he could dimly see the rough walls, a spot of colour here and there that was a picture, and the glistening mass of Eloise's hair as she sat by the table reading.

He raised his eyes slowly and saw the dim edge of the hills vaguely tossing against the star-sprinkled sky. The mighty diapason of the wilderness roared in his ears. The brandishing trees, the virile, primitive wilderness, the sky, the stars! What magnificence was there! What mysterious dignity of unexplained creation! What illimitable, unimaginable distances leading out and up through ethereal essence to God Himself, perhaps.

It was a moment for a Shelley to feel and to interpret. Bream found it all a meaningless jumble to-night. His eyes dropped down again to the cabin window and, suddenly, he knew that that yellow square meant more to him than anything on the earth, or above the earth, or in all the interstellar spaces that

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have stimulated faith or imagination since man was.

She was there in a place the size of a square rood, near him in the flesh as in the spirit, unapproachable as a veiled deity, forbidden even to his thoughts, but yet there.

The splendours of God's firmament, all silver and black in the flowing river of the wind, became as naught to him, for he knew that he stood at the centre of the world.

CHAPTER XIII

OF LABOUR AND A RED MUFFLER

WHEN Allan Mackenzie had been swinging an axe for some three hours the next morning he suddenly found himself face to face with an urgent problem. How could he quit and keep his face in camp?

Quitting seemed, then, the most desirable of all life's blessings. His hands flamed with new-raised blisters, his knees trembled, and he felt as if someone had broken him in two across the small of the back; every motion caused him agony. His mind was filled with a haze of pain, and he looked forward to noon as St. Laurence on the grill must have looked forward to Paradise.

How to quit and yet save his face?

It couldn't be done, he found, after many attempts to make such a proceeding plausible; especially since he had told Joe confidentially in the beginning that it would be better for discipline if he showed him, Allan, no favours. And yet . . . under the torture his mind evolved many ingenious evasions of this order, much after the manner of a Moor on the rack in 1574 A.D. when quizzed regarding his private beliefs. But, under the heartless scrutiny of the Inquisition [in this case a certain wiry pride of place and mental superiority] they were found wanting, and the screw went blithely over another turn.

Mackenzie shrank from physical punishment. Extremely sensitive and high-strung when a boy, he had been blunderingly subjected to a rigorous leather education that had branded him forever with a fear of pain. His lying and deceiving in petty wrongdoings to escape punishment at that time had really laid the foundations of his evil career. Parents, take notice. But on the other hand he was of good stock, and had inbred in him through generations the top-lofty British attitude toward persons of lower social standing—which Joe and the shantymen now unquestionably represented. Could he in self-respect yield before them?

These were the forces that warred in the wretched man's soul during that endless day, and, be it said to the credit of his pig-headed English ancestors, that he stuck it out to the end. Then, carrying his axe, he stumbled home on feet that had lost all feeling and rolled into his bunk like a bag of meal.

"I stuck it out, Ellie," he told his wife with that familiar wistful look, as if he had secretly hoped to please her. And she, a little surprised at his endurance, warmed the cockles of his far from stout heart with sincere praise.

That night he divided the time between sleeping in snatches and kneading out cramps that twisted his overstrained muscles into agonising knots. With morning came the awful prospect of the day in the woods and his resolution wavered.

"Damn it, if I was a hand I'd get my time," he thought. "But I'm an owner and I can't. . . . What was the use of sticking it out yesterday if I am going to quit to-day? . . . Oh, Lord, I can hardly move! Oh Lord! But I'll stick it out for an hour. They

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say the first hour is the worst. . . . Ugh! my hands."

They were blistered and red and sore, and the fingers were curled tightly so that he had to straighten them out separately. Even then he could scarcely hold them open. When he touched an axe handle it felt as if he had grasped a hot iron. His caulked boots were stiff with sweat and he could hardly put them on. Every movement he made was acute torture.

Bream, who was watching the experiment secretly, did not expect Mackenzie to come up for the second round, and was accordingly surprised to see him at breakfast. The poor wretch could hardly feed himself, but he responded with grimacing good nature to the banter of some of his companions. That banter, he felt, closed the door of escape behind him. Evidently he was under observation from all sides. He had to make good.

That first hour in the woods he thought was going to be his last. Never in his life had he suffered such anguish. Then, gradually, as his muscles worked out, the pain disappeared and he found himself horribly weak.

He finished that evening tottering, but not once all day had he quit or complained. He felt a bit proud of himself. The wiry nerve and pride that had taken him through the first day changed now to fighting spirit, and he knew that henceforth only accident could defeat him. But he had not yet reached the crisis.

Each morning was a repetition of the first except that his blisters had commenced to callous and his back was less lame. He had fewer cramps at night now but his sleep (from seven to six o'clock) seemed

but a drop in the bucket of his need. A great physical weariness pressed down upon him that seemed to be increasing into a kind of torpor. His limbs became leaden, unfeeling, and reluctant to obey his will. His life-forces were at an ebb that he had never imagined possible.

The fifth morning he again felt as if he were going to die, this time from exhaustion. He seemed to be struggling through some endless nightmare, making heavy motions with a tremendous effort of the will but without sensation. Slower and slower he worked, his bloodshot eyes becoming glassy. Then, just as he vaguely told himself that all was over, something happened. What it was he did not know, but, suddenly, the panoply of feeble age dropped from him and he found himself strong, eager, and elastic—possessed of infinite endurance. His blood coursed freely again, his muscles slid smoothly under his skin. By noon he had caught and was working with the fastest men in the gang. Thereafter, except for the usual stiffness of his hands, he was in perfect condition.

With this victory came his rise. Able to do his share, except in the most skilful axe work, he next remembered Bream's counsel regarding the superiority of brains over muscle, and put his own to work upon the simple engineering problems that faced the road-makers. His first suggestion had to do with corduroying across a swamp. He pointed out that, instead of using the inevitable birch for the under supports according to Joe's fixed plan, the, to them, valueless hard wood that stood among the pine would provide a more economical and lasting foundation. The scheme was tried with satisfactory results.

This had its effect upon him. It granted him a slight

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position of authority, which, in turn, gave birth to a feeling of responsibility. It was the first time he had felt responsible for anything except his skin and his liberty, and it brought home to him the fact that upon his actions and decisions, even in such minute matters, rested the good of the firm. And the realisation suddenly awoke in him another sensational discovery; that he *was* one of the firm. This brought him pride of a different sort than he had ever known.

It became a source of satisfaction at times to think that here were seventy men eating his food and breaking their backs to do his work; looking up to him as one who had achieved the pinnacle of ambition—ownership. At other times he thrilled with the thought that he and they, isolated, cut off from help, were conquering the wilderness that only waited in its blind, primitive way to conquer them. He scanned each day's scaling tally eagerly, hoping that it would exceed that of the day before.

But it was some time before he admitted that these pleasurable sensations were the fruit of the unfamiliar tree of honesty.

When at last the road-making was finished Mackenzie's gang joined the swampers and cutters, and here he received further initiation into the mysteries of the work. Now the enthusiasm for the thing had got into him, and he ate, slept, and dreamed timber. When his nimble brain, never still, caught the germ of an idea he would take it to Bream, or work over it himself at night with pencil and paper until it was perfectly clear in his own mind before submitting it to his partner. Most of his suggestions were bad, but now and then he hit upon something of practical value.

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This was so in the specific case of decking at the skidways.

The skidways were square clearings at either side of the logging road to which the logs were hauled on the travoys after cutting. Here two parallel timbers, laid transversely to the road and called "skids," formed andirons upon which the logs were piled. "Decking" was the process of hauling logs to the top of such piles and was a dangerous business. It was accomplished by means of a steel cable run through a high, suspended pulley, the log being rolled up the face of the pile by a loop of the cable much as a pencil may be rolled in a loop of string. The motive power was a horse on one end of the line. This method gave the log every opportunity to slip or slide out one side or the other and resulted in many narrow escapes for the cant-hook men who assisted in the operation.

Allan Mackenzie when he was transferred to the decking gang early in November, felt at once that he had found his place. Tough as wire now, quick, agile, finding a certain pleasure in matching his wits against the blind force of the logs, he became a skilful cant-hook man almost by instinct. He found here a job upon which he could exercise his mind to his heart's content, for in it he faced problems of stress, strain, leverage, and power application that changed with every hour of the day.

His scheme for improvement was obvious and simple. After a talk with Bream orders were sent out to the saw-gangs that when they measured the logs they should also mark the exact centre of each. Next, a hook and chain were attached to the loose end of the decking line and the timber, wrapped

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securely at the marked centre, was sent up in perfect safety as steel girders are raised on new buildings. Once the log was in place Barry measured or scaled it and stamped it with the Bream and Mackenzie mark on each end.

"Funny you never thought of that," Allan told Bream with a little self-conscious pride.

"Fact is," said Dick, "I'm so busy planning the work so there won't be a lost day or minute or motion, that I have to leave the way it's done to the men; and though Borwell and Dorlon are exceptional foremen I don't think they're inventors. It's a great relief to me to know there is someone in the field with brains enough to see these necessary things."

It was Bream's first word of outspoken commendation and Allan warmed. To him every hour brought fresh wonder at his partner's mastery of the business; his memory, his grasp of detail, his ability to put his finger almost instantly on the key to a baffling situation.

There was a skill and foresight in his daily disposition of the various gangs that provoked even the confirmed camp wiseacres to admiration.

Realising all this, Allan's achievement dwindled to its proper proportions and he became aware of how far he must yet go before he could qualify as a "full" partner. Still, he had won his spurs in a straight ahead, give-and-take, honest fight with something, and the peculiar, warm glow of satisfaction that filled and remained with him was doubly delightful because entirely new.

With the men he was increasingly popular in his own way, for, as he grew happier, his old ready wit returned. The noon hour was always the merrier

because of him; which phrase might be not without a certain bravery as an epitaph.

So far as Bream was concerned, he encouraged Mackenzie in the course he had undertaken. Not in a personal strain, for no reference to the past or present ever passed between them, but in conferences as one partner to another, or in consideration of the other's multifarious schemes for betterment. To Bream the man's new attitude appeared no more than sensible, and was commendable only for that reason. He did not believe that it predicated any fundamental change in character.

All this was vaguely plain to Allan and acted upon him as a spur. His pride again responded and his newly-created fighting spirit remained at a keen edge.

But one fact dimmed the satisfaction of his triumphs: Eloise's attitude towards him remained apparently unchanged. With a naïveté of selfishness and oblivion to the past that was characteristic he thought: "I am doing everything she could wish. My money is honestly invested; I am working hard with no thought of turning any deal; I am giving more than I'll get. If I have changed for the better why isn't she a little different, a little warmer towards me? Why doesn't all this bring her back to me?"

He forgot that these concessions to her ideal of life were without volition on his part, were reaction from a month-long sulk that had met defeat. He did not put to himself the question: "If I were free would I continue in the old way?" He felt that having complied with the letter of her desires nothing should now stand between them, and, when this expectation failed of fulfilment, he went about his activities vaguely mystified and hurt.

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The snow held off until late that year, a favour for which Bream was audibly thankful every day of extra grace. Having started his camp-building and road-making in August, he was behind in his cutting since his whole force could not be applied to it. However, when the middle of November arrived with the ground still bare, anxiety lessened as regarded the ten million feet he had contracted to deliver to Krug and Lableau at Abimoming. Should the worst happen the remainder of the cutting could still be done.

Old Jimmie, the former master at Eton, predicted snow one evening when one of his fingers, an infallible weather prophet, commenced aching while he bedded down the horses. Not long afterwards a high wind came sweeping down out of the Northwest, the chill of the vast barrens in its breath, and that night the men went to bed to the clicking of diamond-hard snowflakes driven against the bunk-house windows. Bream, making his rounds lantern in hand, could scarcely breathe in the icy blast and fled back to the office, satisfied that at last winter had arrived.

Next day the men rested while the storm had its will. Then was the bunk-house a snug harbour. With the stove roaring red hot and tobacco in abundance the shantymen lay in their bunks shouting to one another across the eddying pall of smoke, or listening to grim tales of blizzards long gone and the deeds they provoked. Ed O'Duffy, one foot raised on a soap box, swayed back and forth on the edge of his bunk while his red and black accordion wailed above the howl of the storm, and Jack or Bill or Pierre favoured with a veteran selection. Sometimes Ed himself would raise a throaty tenor on the verse of some

long-drawn lumbermen's chanty, and the men on their backs, beating time with their thick-stockinged feet, would crash out the chorus in a mighty bellow. On this day, too, were the youths made to know their place in the presence of their betters, and to suffer those rough ordeals by which they gained full admission to the councils of the bunk-house. If, in such ceremonies, a fight or two resulted, so much the better for the occasion as long as no man was seriously injured.

In the other buildings too, unusual events were going forward. An hour before noon Eloise said to Allan: "I'll warrant you don't know that this is Dick's birthday," and he, looking up mystified from some plan he was drawing, acknowledged the fact.

"We lumbermen don't go in for sentimentalism and anniversaries very much. Haven't time to remember them."

"I suppose that's true, dear. But I happened to remember the date and knitted this red neck muffler for him. Shall we go over to the office and give it to him?"

"Why, yes, if you want, Ellie." He rose, casting regretful glances at his interrupted work, and helped her into an outside wrap.

The wind nearly bowled him over when he opened the door and, as they fought their way breathlessly through the swirling snow towards the office, they could see Jimmie staggering into the bunk-house with an armful of wood. Farther away the white figures of two teamsters keeping clear a path to the stable appeared like shadowy marionettes.

They reached the office tingling and stamping the snow from their feet. Bream, who was going over the scaling tallies for the month with Barry, sprang up

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from the desk, surprised and delighted at the visit. Never had Eloise looked so beautiful to him. Her wind-whipped cheeks glowed with colour and her eyes were like stars. Big snowflakes caught on her lashes or snared in the silken meshes of her hair gave her a look of unreal, wild beauty that made him think, fancifully, that the sprite of the storm had ridden in through the door on the gale.

"How jolly!" he exclaimed, dragging towards the stove two chairs that had once been kegs. "By George it's a day! But I'm just lazy enough to relish a lay-off!"

Eloise unwrapped the shawl from her throat and looked about the office. She had always liked the place because it seemed masculine and had an air of being the centre of power.

Immediately at the right of the door was a counter six feet long behind which, against the grimy front window, stood Barry's desk and high stool. About the middle of the left wall stood the "van," a huge wardrobe-looking affair stuffed full of boots, socks, shirts, and other clothing to be drawn on by the men. In the middle was the stove and against the back wall four "muzzle-loader" bunks, so designated because the occupant entered over the foot of his bed instead of at the side. These were built like fo'c'stle berths, two above and two below. Against the right wall was suspended a smaller cabinet containing plug tobacco, matches, pipes, etc., and on both sides of it bristled nails for hanging clothes. There were the usual lamps in brackets.

Bream offered the inevitable dish of tea from the top of the stove to both, and his tobacco to Allan. The latter, now that he had come, entered somewhat into the spirit that had brought Eloise.

"My dear fellow, your hospitality is charming," he said, "but I'll warrant you are bursting to know why we are here."

"Informal call, I suppose." Bream leaned against the counter and scanned first one face and then the other.

"Well, hardly." This from Eloise. "A visit in pomp and circumstance set down as an informal call. Allan, how unobservant your friend is!"

"Come now, you two," laughed Bream, scenting the unusual, "what's up?"

"Look at the calendar, sir!" commanded Mackenzie, without quite achieving the irascible thunder of Dr. Johnson.

Dick obediently looked at a fly-blown calendar above the desk that portrayed in fourteen shades of colour the grandeur of Mt. McKinley as seen from a distance.

"November seventeenth," he said to himself earnestly. "November seventeenth." Then, suddenly, the familiarity of the sound raised an answering vibration in his mind and the truth dawned on him.

"Thunder, I know now!" he cried, feeling a little foolish. "My birthday."

"Brilliant youth!" said Allan, rising. "Guessed right the very first time! Many of them, Dick." The two men clasped hands for the first time since Allan's return long ago from his trip to Montreal. Eloise had risen also and now held out her hand in congratulation.

"The day that you remember,
The day that I forgot!"

misquoted Bream, laughing, and for a moment the girl's heart leaped with inexplicable emotions at the

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unexpected phrase. There was a swift picture of one perfect day and the flurry had passed.

"Don't blame it on me," disclaimed Allan, "it was Eloise's doing."

"I might have known! The women are death on anniversaries." Dick's voice was bantering but his eyes were not wholly unmoved.

"And death on those that have them," said Eloise. "See what I have wished on you!" and from behind her she produced the knitted red muffler.

For a moment Bream could hardly believe that this was true. His birthday, and someone had remembered it! How unlike was this to any birthday he had had in the last six years.

"You—you made that for *me*?" His tone was gently incredulous.

"No one else this time, though I have several others under way."

As by some mental magic carpet Dick was transported back to childhood, the land of birthdays. Memories awoke in him that had long lain undisturbed, memories of his mother and father, of old places and friends. Suddenly he felt anew the loss of that life he could never recall and, because beneath his splendid manhood he was at heart a boy, his eyes grew misty as he looked down at the humble gift he held in his hand.

"It was sweet—sweet of you, Eloise," he said with surging tenderness, the wave of his love for her leaping over the momentarily neglected flood-gates. "I shall never forget it, never."

Then, of a sudden, he recalled himself and laughed and turned the crisis aside, fearful lest she should have seen the momentary nakedness of his soul. Of

Allan he did not think in this connection, so great was his concern regarding Eloise.

But Allan had seen and heard, and, sitting at the table in his cabin an hour later, he sought vainly to comprehend the suspicion of his senses. Against their clamour stood forth reason and friendship and incredibility, assuring him that sudden appearances are not fact, and that Bream of all men would not love in this dangerous fashion. Comfortable and good to believe were the words of these counsellors. And yet, what, then, of the senses, his protectors? Had they lied? Had they failed in their trust?

Bewildered, dazed, he could not answer. He knew that he must not be rash, must not believe because of one suspicion. . . .

Time would tell, he conceded at last. Let the future decide; let eyes and ears prove their case if they could.

CHAPTER XIV

DEAD HEARTS OF MANY DREAMS

AND now was the winter of Bream's discontent. True love, despite the wisdom of certain bachelor philosophers and poets, depends for fatal effect upon three things: quality, affinity, and propinquity. It has been said that the heaven-sent fire will leap to its own across all things regardless—like the spark of a Rumkorff coil. But there arises here a delicate question of honour, since honourable people refuse the acceptance of such fire unless they are perfectly sure that it comes clear of debt and duty, especially duty. Perhaps, then, there are degrees in honour?

Imagine Bream, evening clothed, on an opera night in New York; a man of fashion and of clubs; a squire of dames and withal an honourable man. A tea engrossed him yesterday, there will be a ball to-morrow, there is opera to-night. It is a huge world, absurdly gay, bewilderingly complex, with a thousand interests and a thousand demands. And he is honourable, both to himself and all mankind, as clean and decent as one of Gouverneur Morris's young gentlemen. Is it not possible, then, to imagine his meeting another man's wife who seems to light the world for him and deliberately putting the thought of her away from him—losing the romance in his multitudinous activities? It has been done in New York, they

say, though no prominent man will be quoted as admitting it.

Compare with this figure the Bream of the woods, the tanned boss of a gang that can lick its weight in wildcats, the man of action and accomplishment in whose busy mind there is still room for one vision, one dream. By the lost temper of an ugly cook the dream is suddenly realised and almost as quickly put aside. But the love is not, for there is no landslide of events to bury it under as in the case of the Gouverneur Morris gentleman. Moreover, this outdoor Bream sacrifices what peace might have been derived from separation. He, because of his love, invites torture into his life by inviting the girl into it for her sake.

Which is the more honourable? He of the high hat or he of the high soul?

It was as impossible for Dick to cease loving Eloise as for the creeks to remain open in the bitter cold. One to whom marriage is the natural climax of development, rather than the last of a series of experiments, cannot ogle and sigh and shrug the shoulders at disappointment. He goes on loving though the object of his passion passes out of his life. When she lives within thirty paces of him in an intimate and circumscribed world the result is obvious.

The winter of Bream's discontentment was upon him. The days shortened, cutting down the hours of daylight and of work, giving him more time for his emotions. Storms came, sometimes blizzards, that stopped all outdoor activity and left him idle for days at a time. And in these days but one desire tortured him: to be with Eloise. He found that a few moments now and again at meal-times were but an

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exasperation. She was more formal then, did not talk and laugh with the same music as when they were alone over the checker-board, did not show the same side to him.

On these more intimate occasions she acted upon him like a drug upon its user. She deadened the pain of the struggle, seemed to satisfy his great need. And yet, when he had left her, the craving would return more insistently than ever, until another meeting lulled him into a sense of false security. Over and over again this happened until he scorned himself as a lovesick schoolboy.

He fought against it with all the will at his command. In the glittering, snow-muffled forest he would sometimes seize an axe or a cant-hook and labour in a frenzy, endeavouring to dull his mental anguish by physical exhaustion. On snowshoes he would tramp incredible miles over his domain, planning the next year's work, or following deer, gun in hand, to supply the camp with fresh meat. When Quarles, the half-breed teamster, returned from a foot journey to Abimoming driving a stout husky-dog team purchased for the camp, Bream turned the attention of his spare hours desperately to them as a new diversion. But not for long, for the dogs were needed almost at once upon the long mail and supply route to Abimoming, now too heavy and dangerous for horses. Once more he was thrown back upon himself.

The dread that he would unconsciously betray his secret grew until it hung over him like a threatening hand. Afraid of expressing too much in Eloise's presence half the time he said nothing, and such behaviour from one who was normally cheerfulness

itself was not lost upon the men. They speculated among themselves.

Bream, like many men whose lives have been cloistered by work or indifference to the world, stood awed and fearful before the power of this thing that he had raised up. From depths he dared not sound voices called, hands reached up in pleading to his brain. Thoughts that he had all his life associated with madness now and again leaped upon him in the half-lit consciousness that had become his sleep. With psychic vision half-averted he saw the roilings of his nature, the sediment of a hundred generations circulating slowly in his mind. Murder, suicide, adultery, all were there, all of them, each with its factitious prospect of relief, each offering a way out.

With the terror of one who hears malevolent ghosts crying in the night wind Bream gazed upon the thousand age-old inheritances that made up his nature. But this only in certain black moments of sleeplessness when the abnormal became the normal, and *vice versa*.

The momentary slip at the presentation of the red knitted muffler had put him on his guard. He had then first realised fully just how weak his defences were, and he had vowed solemnly that if his secret were spared to him this time it should remain undiscovered forever.

His prayer was answered, as he knew at once by Eloise's unchanged attitude of warm, almost dependent friendship. Of Allan he never thought at all.

This was natural. Bream's long association as a superior with men had made him abrupt in his dealings with them. Either a man was or he was not. So far, Allan, despite his right-about in the matter of

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work was not. Just as Jules was not after the flask episode. There was another and very different reason for his attitude. Ever since their first meeting Allan had encouraged the *triple entente*, often telling off Bream to entertain Eloise when he himself had personal plans that he wished to carry out. Because of this ease and indifference Bream had no reason to suspect that Allan would be keen enough to notice the brief flash of that day in the office.

As a consequence he wasted no thought upon Allan.

But Allan wasted a good deal upon him. The suspicion that had leaped to his mind then had been confirmed to his satisfaction a dozen times. The not quite easy speech with Eloise, the uneasy avoidance of her, the absence and preoccupation of his partner's mind, all were convincing of the truth.

But let it be said to Allan's credit that his months of hard work and self-discipline bore their first fruit in his restraint when the conviction came home. Tough of muscle, clear of mind, alert, enamoured still of the sweet taste of ambition and success, he brought a different personality to bear on the subject than was his eight weeks before.

His first feeling was one of wretched and helpless anger at Bream. So this was what it had come to! He swore to the black, frozen trees beneath which he paced that he would get out of here to-morrow and end this! Then he recalled with a sudden access of flaming rebellion that he would do nothing of the kind since Bream had brought him to the Y with the purpose of keeping him there, and had sworn to kill him if he sought to escape.

Of course that was past now. Bream would not kill him, but he would pursue and bring him back

should he attempt to carry out his impulse. Damn this life anyway! You did your best and this is what you got for it! Why had Bream brought him up here in the first place? Why didn't he jail him and be done with it? . . . Oh, yes, he remembered now. Eloise had pleaded for him that wretched day at Hampton. He had heard her dimly from his room upstairs, and had thought it mighty clever and loyal of her at the time; a magnificent proof of her devotion!

Here he stopped pacing up and down the little path of beaten snow he had made for himself. He had abruptly left his gang that afternoon and come deep into the forest to think this thing out alone. There being no wind silence was everywhere, silence except for the snap of a tree in the cold or the scolding of a whiskey-jack on some snow-laden bough. He stopped pacing, struck with an idea.

Bream had brought him up here for Eloise's sake not for his own! After all, there was no other explanation for the Quixotic action. Was it possible that he had loved her even then? . . . Pondering long he became convinced of this fact. A hundred little incidents that had meant nothing to him before now appeared in a new and significant light. He cursed the blindness that had made a fool of him and then, even as he cursed, ceased abruptly as a thought, entirely new to his nature, broke upon him.

"After all, perhaps it's my own fault," he said slowly. . . .

When the first instinctive anger had passed he was no longer jealous of Bream. Only too clearly did he realise the fight his partner was making against dishonour. He was aware, too, that Bream had not once

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thought of him in this connection, that the matter was, with him, subjective not objective. And not once did he doubt the other's strength in the crisis. This was a strange faith, and one without precedent in his experience; and yet it existed without wavering and without question, an offspring of Bream's own character.

Always, but particularly since his own first steps in right living, Mackenzie had acknowledged Bream a splendid figure, one who held himself high. He had grown to feel a respect for and confidence in the other's integrity, moral and physical, that was almost axiomatic. Such a feeling Bream always inspired. Deep down within him Hill had felt it, and it was daily plain that his men felt it. And, because of the contrast with his own weak, vacillating nature, Mackenzie came under the spell of it more deeply even than they. It was something inherent in the man, not cultivated, and Bream would have disclaimed it scornfully had it been attributed to him.

Allan, loving deeply and, one might say, unrewarded, unconsciously felt for Bream. There was something in the other's stoic heroism and sacrifice for love that stirred the swindler to a kind of sympathy—a sympathy founded upon that axiomatic certainty of his partner's strength.

"God! How is this going to end?" he asked himself, deserting the snow-tramped glade and starting homeward through the light of a cold, yellow sunset.

By four o'clock, when he reached the camp, it was quite dark and he knew that the men must be on their way in from work. The windows of all the dwelling shanties, the kitchen and dining-room glowed with the soft radiance of dim lamplight, and there were

sounds of activity both in the stables and cooks' quarters.

As he passed the office he heard voices inside and instantly distinguished one of them as that of Eloise, the other Bream's. He stopped in his tracks, torn between an unfamiliar sense of honour and an impulse that was, for the nonce, more curiosity than suspicion. That Eloise should be in the office was natural. She went there often for thread or yarn or some trifle she needed. But now Mackenzie's recent cogitations lent the visit a new and deeper significance. Helpless against a situation as certainly stainless as a child's soul and yet as fraught with danger as a hidden reef, he could not force himself away. He *must* know, he *must* hear.

From where he had stopped short in the darkness he could not see into the office because of the loom of the "van" across a window that was raised a little for ventilation. Only the voices came to him, or now but one voice, his wife's.

"When I was a little girl, Mr. Dick," she said, speaking so brightly that Allan could imagine the twinkle in her eyes, "I had a Cree nurse, Akapukis, and to her I owe my undoubtedly excellent behaviour. She believed that naughty girls and evil wood spirits were close friends—in fact that naughty girls actually had them inside. And whenever I was sulky or grumpy or pulled her awful old hair too hard she would take me outside the stockade of the fort in the direction of the forest and say: 'Go on out there; they are waiting for you.' And I would begin to cry, of course."

"Old brute to frighten a child like that!" growled Bream.

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"Perhaps, but I wasn't so terribly frightened. It was the thought of the disreputable company my sins had condemned me to that hurt the worst, and I used to feel horribly ashamed. You would have, too, if you had seen some of the pictures she drew of the spirits that were to be my special intimates. My snobbishness suffered but I would honestly try to be nice for a while. . . . Isn't this mitten coming on splendidly? . . . Now I am going to be your Akapukis, Mr. Dick, and you must be properly humble. You have been a very unruly man of late."

"I?"

Mackenzie could imagine Bream's feigned surprise, just as he could picture the scene in the office: Eloise ensconced comfortably in a chair, knitting and chatting, quaintly, as she worked; Bream standing, perhaps his dead pipe between his teeth, or sitting and whittling towards the stove.

"That reply is thoroughly of a piece with your recent behaviour," she resumed, sternly, and Bream snorted helplessly. "You have been scowling and growling and rumbling about this camp like a bear for the last two weeks. You have hardly spoken to me at meal-times, you have avoided me afterwards, and as for a game of checkers—I declare I have just about given up all hope. . . . No, you needn't try to bribe me with tea! I have had two cups already. . . . And what have you done instead of playing checkers with me? You have hunted deer when you knew there was enough venison in camp to last a week; you have been industriously figuring on that old site for your dam—yes, I nearly said it—when the plans are already drawn and in that desk. Will you explain me the why of that, Mr. Growly-Grump?"

And you have worked the men until they are half-dead, and gone over the accounts with Mr. Barry until he is frantic. He tells me that every night in his sleep he chases a penny up one page and down the other of a book fourteen feet thick and a hundred feet high." She paused a moment for breath. . . .

"And that muffler I gave you. Now there's another sin. Despite your knowing that these very lily-white hands made it, have you ever worn it? I need not pause for a reply. I imagine that the 'turkey' I see over there in the corner knows it much better than you do. . . ."

"Oh, but really——"

"Indeed! I have an idea that perhaps you dislike red, or that you think it will frighten the snow buntings, or that neck mufflers are too plebeian for the owner of B. & M. No. 1! In fact, I have any number of ideas. Oh, don't protest! It means nothing to me except that you are an exceedingly unruly man and I am going to find out all about it. There now, serves you right! Well may you flush and fidget! . . .

"I promise you, sir, that if you don't mend your ways I shall send you out into the forest where those wood spirits will get you—because there are boy spirits as well as girl. And jolly glad to get you they'll be, and they won't let you come back any more either. . . . Oh, I know just what they do.

"But I'll be frank with you and tell you that I'd rather keep you here, if you'll be frank with me and tell me what has happened to make you such a Mr. Unruly-Man-Dick.

"What is it, now,—the work? Is anything wrong with the work?"

Still standing motionless in the snow Mackenzie

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listened with amazement. Was that Eloise talking? His Eloise? Why, he had never heard her chatter so! Like an old maid at a tea-party, by Gad! Not in all their life together had she rambled on like that; at least not to him. What had come over her?

And the cool, delightful brass of the thing! There she sat (he was positive) in one of Dick's barrel-chairs, knitting away and looking up now and then—as much at home as if she had gone to spend the afternoon with Mrs. McTavish, the factor's wife at Moose. And all the time blandly oblivious to time and place; *quite* oblivious to him who was now supposed to be tramping homeward with his gang.

"No," said Bream, slowly and a little thickly, as he answered Eloise's question, "the work is all right."

The thickness of that answer caught Mackenzie's ear and, all of a sudden, he saw the other side of the picture—Bream's side, the tortured, wretched side.

"Then—is it you, Mr. Dick?" persisted Eloise. "Something about you? Are you ill?" There was a moment's pause. "Don't tell me you are ill! You shall go straight down to Abimorning by the next sledge if you are. Poor Mr. Unruly-Man!"

To Mackenzie, listening with tugging heart, there sounded a change here. The almost invisibly slender line between play and seriousness had been crossed. Her voice, light and girlish before, had suddenly grown deeper with genuine sympathy and gentle command. Vaguely some memory, bringing with it an old ache, stirred in Allan.

"No, no, no! I am not ill! I am all right!" Bream burst out suddenly, almost wildly, as if the words had been wrung from him.

The palms of Mackenzie's hands sweated at the agony of it.

"God! She doesn't know how hard she is making it for him!" he thought with instinctive realisation.

"Dick," there was no banter now, "forgive me. I've been horrid. I've nagged you to death. I'm an old busybody and you are an old angel. But I want you back just as you were; the nice man who always let me nearly win at checkers. I miss you. *Truly* I do, Dick. Won't you come back?"

Mackenzie's heart caught and seemed to stop. Where, when, had he heard her voice vibrating with that thrilling timbre, that vital, quiet hinting at unfathomable depths gently stirred? It was a memory; a voice of the past; a voice that had filled his soul once with a thousand vague aspirations. Long ago that was, long ago. . . . Before she had realised that she loved him . . . in that perfect summer at Moose Factory.

A mad fear gripped him so that he shook as if with an ague. Not daring to face it, beating it back from him, he staggered away into the woods just as the gangs whooped in at the lower end of camp.

CHAPTER XV

"I AM THAT WHICH BEGAN"

ON he went blindly, stumblingly, crashing through the bare, brittle underbrush like a wounded animal, heedless of anything but the instinct to run from this fear.

He ran, but the fear followed faster and caught him with contorted face buried in up-flung arms against a shorn, dead pine. And it whispered to him: "Is she in danger of loving Bream as Bream loves her?"

He quivered as though lashed, strung up thus against a whipping-post. Then, when the words grew less unendurable, he lifted his head and drew down his hands, facing the question squarely as one does when the game is up.

"She does not love him consciously—yet," he thought. "Else she could never be with him, could not talk with him so, visit him so. It is not conscious." . . . Ah! And perhaps after all, it was a dream fear, due to his damnable readiness to believe! Perhaps he had read into her speech feelings that were not hers. Certainly she was unconscious of them, blithely, freely unconscious. Perhaps, then, they did not exist. It was his hope.

And yet, once more, what of the evidence of his senses? Though she was unconscious of any feeling

now, could she remain so always? His heart withered even as it answered.

Allan's mind rose swiftly above the vulgar plane that had as its horror the possible horns on his own forehead. No fear of that disturbed him. If his faith in Bream was unshaken, what of his faith in Eloise? The sun would fall sooner than she—though she loved like the wondrous Héloise herself! That was his faith, and his mind leaped at once beyond the mere sex aspect to the consideration of more vital things—forces and causes and effects. If matters had come to this why was it so, who was to blame, where should he turn?

Gazing blankly into luminous darkness he commenced to feel the first faint pressure of a burden of guilt. His knowledge of life told him inflexibly that where love faltered there was lack, not at the source but in the object. . . . Was every vestige of feeling for him dead in her then? Had he really reached a point where he supplied nothing in her life?

Because he had come to this crisis in sincerity and pain he met its issues resolutely, not deferring them nor turning them aside with old-time cynical sophistry. That was past now. The very existence of his inmost being lay at stake; the one firm, indestructible, noble thing in his whole nature—his love for her—was called in question.

"She is gone. I have lost her. Oh God!" he cried in bitter realisation.

With acute vision he saw that his crooked tree of life was bearing its poisoned fruit, that the wind sown was reaping the whirlwind, that prophecy long scoffed at was in its fulfilment. He saw it now, and despair enveloped him like a garment.

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Swiftly the panorama of his life with her passed before his eyes; the radiant days of their first meeting and love when he had seemed to her a perfect knight; their marriage and those brief, delirious, unstained days; the resurrection of his unworthiness and her bitter disillusion; the ensuing years when his selfish cruelty had torn the bond between them like the rending of the flesh itself. Ah, with what sacrilege had he violated the Grail that she had placed in his hands! No Galahad he, but a Modred, traitorous in thought and deed, marching stealthily against the high throne of their love.

"Oh that I have done this!" his soul cried out. "Done this to her!" And in that cry of utter abasement was first voiced his hitherto unrealised duty to another life, another soul than his own. Gone was the thought of self, that moving force of what had been his life; remained only the certain knowledge of stewardship unfulfilled, responsibility cast aside.

The night was silent about him. Above the motionless black trees the coruscating stars glittered hard as diamonds. The snow gleamed dimly, seeming to stifle a paralysed earth.

"Responsibility cast aside to be taken up by another!" The thought sank in, hurting him cruelly.

. . . And yet not taken up, for Bream had put it from him, would put it from him. . . .

"Bream, too! I have ruined his life! . . . Dick! One of God's own! . . . Ah!" . . . It was a sigh. "Ah! . . . All my life I have done nothing but destroy. . . . The finest and best . . ." There was a long pause. The thoughts were coming slower now. . . . "And he suffers to keep my honour! . . . Oh!"

In the slow descent of his spirit there was an accom-

panying ebb of the life forces. His thoughts faltered, his strength failed, and he came slowly, wearily to his knees in the snow, gripping his hands in front of him. His mind retained the thought of Bream like the mystic vision of a rapt saint. He lifted his grey, drawn face to the jewelled heavens, and, dimly, the sky rained pitying starshine upon it—the intangible blessing of the deeps. . . .

Dick Bream, Dick Bream! Farther apart than the poles were they, he and Dick; farther apart than Dives in Hell and Lazarus on Abraham's bosom; farther apart than parents who hate over the body of their child. . . .

Oh worthy to be loved, but strong to put aside if need be his own needs and desires. Oh worthy to be loved, but doomed to barren pain because goodness and truth and honour were fibre of his soul and flesh, not expedients to serve his ends. Oh worthy to be loved who could never love again! That was Dick! What was there, under God, that sustained that life to its slow burning? . . .

Then, like the taste of brass in his mouth, like the jingling cheapness of criminal coinage to his ears, was the memory of his own life. What clinker for the dump heap of the universe! What dross in the furnace of this thing called life!

Suddenly he felt in his utter degradation as lonely, as detached, as some black planet doomed to hurtle forever through illimitable space, lightless, hopeless, without resource.

He was still now with a stillness that was cosmic, as Chaos might have been before Creation, profoundly listening. And, presently, there came to the ears of his

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soul a sound as of myriad tiny voices, myriad activities never still. They grew, they waxed with confused babel. The bleak death of the wilderness seemed alive with a dynamic sentience.

The billion snowflakes whispered of teeming waters and throbbing mills, fruit of their inconceivable, latent power. The tall trees, wise with the ages, murmured of lusty sap and pulsing leaf-veins yet to be. Waiting, waiting, waiting they were, not dead but sleeping the vital sleep of gestation. With face still uplifted he saw the stars, restlessly brilliant, most magnificent of mysteries yet incontrovertible evidence of a Plan, visible confirmation of man's blind faith. And they sang together in the irrefragable harmony of law laid upon thinking substance.

And suddenly, as he listened, he felt every fibre within him thrill in response to those murmurous voices and vital activities, felt them join and blend into one great, passionate yearning, soundless but flung out and up to those stars in the last cry of a derelict soul. Desire, which is life, was at its apogee. Even for him, the burnt-out planet, there was no death.

"Oh . . . help me. . . . If there is anything anywhere give it to me now." His head bowed upon his breast. "If there is anything let me lift myself up! . . . Let me live again."

Who has asked in sincerity and truth and it has not been given? Who has knocked and it has not been opened unto him? Desire must bring its own fulfilment, yearning its consummation. And to Allan Mackenzie, kneeling there, listening close to the heart of the universe, an answer came: a great peace, as wide and all-embracing as the sea, a peace immense, sustaining, unspeakably mothering.

There was a swift, lifting exaltation, a stirring as if an angel's wing had brushed close by, and a momentary touching of some height that is without description in human speech. Then there was a dropping back, and all through him flowed a warm tide of sure, unshakable knowledge; a realisation of divinity within and without. No longer did he feel himself a poisoned lump of clay made animate; every atom of his being seemed alive, shouting a glad recognition of his eternal kinship with deathless constructive forces. The turning-point of his spiritual journey though the ages had come. He was as one slain to a resurrection.

"There *is* something for me!" his soul cried, sublimely convinced. "All, everything, is for me if I will but stand up and take it!"

The wonder, the joy of the knowledge seemed to blaze about him like a golden glory; it ran warm in his veins and melted the ice in his breast; it raised up before his eyes the full-blown flowers of aspiration and illusion, long since dead and withered in his old-young heart. There was yet time for him to do much! Ah, so much! But it would mean treading the path of this life swiftly, very swiftly. How much time he had wasted! Now every minute was precious! . . .

And so he came gradually and naturally into spiritual strength and resolution. Since there was something for him to do, or to have, or to be, he thrilled with eagerness to do and have and be it fully, perfectly and unstintingly. He felt at last what he had ever before denied, the sacredness and responsibility of self. At certain moments he saw with flashlight distinctness how all of misery and dishonour that he

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had brought upon those who had touched his life was chargeable only to himself; and at others he knew that just as he had torn down and ruined so could he build up and rehabilitate.

He sprang to his feet alive with eagerness, lifting his face to that remote and ever-to-be-worshipped sky. And what had before come down as pitying starshine upon him shone now a radiant benediction. And to it there was added a new light from within. He turned at last and started back to camp, strong in resolution, happier than he had ever been.

The question of telling Eloise of this thing that had come to him arose, but he shrank from such a course with a sudden shyness and a twinge of fear. Not yet. He knew that every thought and habit of his former life could not be eradicated over night, and that a bitter struggle against the out-reaching tentacles of the past was before him. If his life were worthy let that tell her, he decided, not his tongue.

The thought of her was sweet, infinitely sweet to him, and in the quick stab of remorse for what he had been to her, he loved her more deeply than ever, understanding at last the depth and richness of her nature. Ah, what he might have brought into her life and she to his! But he would win her back, God helping. There was time yet and he would make amends for all their woe. She did not love him now, but she had once, and she must again!

Suddenly he was face to face with the wretched thought that had sent him staggering out into the forest to his salvation. Bream! Was she in danger of loving Bream as Bream loved her?

A shock of new-found resolution tempered with justice straightened him to meet this issue. Just

as he worshipped Eloise so did he admire Bream for his splendidly honourable conduct. With the eye of one who at last discerns the Truth, Allan saw that his partner possessed every trait, every characteristic that Eloise had demanded of himself and which he had lacked. He knew, certainly and absolutely, that only a man of Bream's unspotted life could ever have the eternal keeping of her soul and the inexhaustible treasure of her love. Could he attain to this and bring her back to him?

Suddenly, as he pondered, the answer came. With a deep up-welling of reverent joy he suddenly knew that now no such gulf separated Dick and himself as had formerly existed; that both he and his partner had reached the same convictions and attained the same qualities only by different routes and at different times; that what one possessed at birth the other had gained by suffering.

A short distance from camp he heard a fusillade of shots and a prolonged hallooing through the forest, and a sudden realisation came to him that in the minds of these others he had been lost since early in the afternoon. He knew they must be looking for him. Also, with a reaction from a purely mental state, he realised that he was ravenously hungry.

At the edge of the camp he met a group of searchers setting out with torches and lanterns. He was hailed with whoops of joy.

"I was lost for a while," he said slowly, smiling in answer to their eager questions, "but after a bit I found my way again. That's all."

He had found the way.

CHAPTER XVI

GRIST OF THE MILL

THE great logging sleigh with its ten-foot spread of bunk creaked and whined over the icy smoothness of the road as if complaining at the bitter cold of the February dawn. Behind it trudged a dozen men with cant-hooks over their shoulders, smoking or spitting or growling brief remarks—one gang of three such on their way to work.

Very powerful and dominant they looked, these men. Their faces were furrowed and pugnacious, with salient jaws and eyes, mostly blue, crinkled at the corners from much squinting against the snow glare. Their hands, now encased in thick woollen mittens, seemed huge, their limbs solid like the limbs of trees. Their clothes made stabs of bright colour against the white banks of snow but lately turned up on either side of the road by the great V-plow. They wore impenetrable but light mackinaws in reds and greens and blues, scarfs and mittens of red, and caps of either wool or fur. Two pairs of trousers worn over thick underwear descended into the tops of great rubber and wool boots. Their feet were protected by two pairs of socks each an eighth of an inch thick.

Day was just breaking, a clear day that would have a sky of hard-polished blue and a sun warming

towards noon in the south-west, its highest point falling far short of the zenith. Breakfast had been finished long since and now some of the men carried the four big dinner baskets that held the noon supply.

As they walked their breath fogged out from their nostrils, forming icicles and frozen drops on their moustaches and beards. It was below zero this morning and the air had that dry quality that makes one cough as it penetrates the lungs.

Crunching along these men seemed the only animate things in the vast silent expanse, until a jay screamed at them from a pine limb and a whiskey-jack scolded back at him from across the road. The woodsman's quick eye might have detected a nuthatch scuttling round and up a tree at their approach, or chickadees and snowbirds on the ground searching for a squirrel's horde, or a grosbeak regarding them with the solemn expression of an aged child. Occasionally with a scuttle and dash a big, white arctic hare darted away into the forest. More often, unknown to them, he sat rigidly upright as they passed, a perfect imitation of a snow-covered stump.

To those who knew their winter wilderness the forest teemed with life. In some sheltered spot in the unravished depths a band of gaunt, red deer were "yarded up." Here and there mink or weazels or squirrels pattered softly about on errands of instinct. Otter and beaver left their trails by frozen water-courses. Delicate prints, half obliterated, told where a fox had passed dragging his brush. Dog-like tracks, in numbers, showed the prowling of a wolf-pack, and a broad, flat pad-mark betrayed a tuft-eared lynx. Everywhere was silence, but the furtive folk were busy.

Presently Pat McCooey, prince of teamsters, drew

up his ponderous team before the mighty snow-covered pile of logs at a skidway and the loading began. It was hard and hazardous work, again bringing into play the decking line that had originally been used in skidding. First a layer of six or seven logs was placed in the bottom of the sleigh. Then upon these another layer, one less numerically than the first, and so on until a single log formed the peak of the pyramid. Two poles laid against the load made a track up which they were dragged and a horse supplied the power. A "top" man, or loader, built the pile on the sleigh and others with cant-hooks kept the timber straight as it slid up the skids. Still others arranged the waiting logs for convenient loading.

No sooner had McCooey filled up and driven off than another sleigh stood ready before the pile, for the teams twice outnumbered the loading gangs.

This hauling was the final task of the winter and to accomplish it the men went to death-grapples with Nature. Though storm after storm beat upon them, filling up the road and making work impossible, yet time after time, doggedly, with shovels and V-plow did they clear it away, working from torch-lit morning far into torch-lit night, eating what and when they could, sleeping in relays without a change of clothes or a moment of leisure. It was the great struggle upon which hinged the fortunes of the firm, and the men went into it like an Irish brigade into battle.

At eight o'clock Bream approached on his first daily round. At a distance he seemed taller than usual and his clothes appeared to hang about him loosely. At close range his face had a slightly drawn

look, almost ascetic, and his burning eyes seemed unusually large. As he drew near he nodded cheerfully to the men and then stood by to watch the work, apparently taking in the details with his accustomed crisp efficiency. But in a few moments a change came over him. The fire gradually died from his eyes, leaving them lack-lustre, and his attitude lost its attentive alertness. It was as if some other matter had intruded on his mind.

Nor, in turn, did this abstraction last long, for, with a little compression of the lips, he once more concentrated his faculties on the work.

At this point the men were sending up a light log to top a sleigh-load, and now, as it neared the tips of the skids it stuck on some natural inequality in the wood. A lumberjack nearest the point of obstruction leaped up the face of the load to remedy the trouble with his cant-hook. Just as he commenced to exert pressure one of his feet slipped and he fell to the ground cursing, his cant-hook clattering after him. His cry of rage was heard by the horse which was decking the stick and he, being sensitive to the least sound of a human voice, as are all of his breed, stopped, slackening the cable. Immediately the log began to slide back upon the man who lay below writhing with the agony of a twisted ankle.

It had all happened in the fraction of a second but not too quickly for Bream to see and recognise the danger. With one bound he seized the disabled man's cant-hook, clamped it near the middle of the log, and received the entire weight. His back bent and his muscles cracked as he met the pressure. Then slowly he commenced to sag and give way under it. The next instant another man, less quick-witted,

clamped on, and his strength turned the tide. Almost immediately the horse started again and the danger was averted.

When Dick and his companion had seen the log safely atop the load the former suddenly stepped back, his face white, and leaned upon his cant-hook wet and weak with exhaustion. The other looked at him in amazement for a moment.

"Ain't quite so able as you was, are you boss?" he said, almost apologetically. "She war'n't a big 'un."

"I guess you're right," panted Bream. "First time a log ever broke me." He smiled, but in his smile there was chagrin and helplessness. "Lucky you clamped on when you did, Ben."

Then, slightly recovered, he knelt down beside the injured man and examined the bared ankle. "Only twisted, I think," he diagnosed. "Here, a couple of you, help Bill back to camp and tell the cook to give him some hot water. Alternate hot and cold band-aids will keep the swelling down."

When the men had gone he turned away down the road to the next skidway leaving a questioning group behind.

"He ain't right," said one shaking his head, mystified. "Dick Bream broke by a little 'un like that! I'd ha' never believed it in a thousand years."

"Ner he don't look like he used to," remarked another. "I've noticed it fer a spell now. He ain't the Dick Bream that come up here last summer, not by a long shot."

"Huh! Too many partners on this job, I guess. I've never knowed it to work yet."

"Or too many partners' wives." The author of this remark drawled it, his one blue eye glittering

humorously, his toothless mouth drooling tobacco juice.

"You shut your dirty face, Tony, an' leave her out of this!"

"Yeh!", "Cut that stuff," "Beeg dam' liar!" and a cloud of abuse smothered the cyclops-eyed miscreant.

"All right—" he shrugged ponderously—"but I know what I know and I see what I see." He spat copiously on his hands and gripped his cant-hook. "And it's botchin' up the work of this camp, lemme tell you."

A silence followed as the men moved slowly to their places. There was too much of truth in the remark to treat it lightly. Curiosity finally conquered prudence.

"Well, Tony, what do ye know an' what do ye see?" someone blurted out at last.

"Ha!" The camp Cassandra laughed scornfully. "Think I'd tell you now? Go to 'ell, the lot o' you!"

This was but an example. In many similar conversations the shadow of rumour was thrown across the close-drawn life of the camp, a shadow that bred idle and evil speculations in minds fallow for such rank growth.

Dick Bream, walking down the icy road, knew nothing of this. He thought only of the truth that had just been borne home to him. Even yet his knees trembled with weakness and he was nauseated with his exertions.

He admitted to himself now that he had anticipated a collapse like this ever since that day, a month ago, when he had first felt physically unfit; that day when the strange weight, now always pressing him down, had settled on his shoulders for the first time. . . .

To be broken by a little stick like that! Were

the men laughing at him behind his back? he wondered. Ah well, let them laugh. What did it matter? He hardly blamed them.

"If I could only sleep at night I wouldn't be like this, I know I wouldn't," he thought vaguely. "That's all I need, sleep, and I would come out here one of these days and surprise the boys."

At the next skidway he found nothing to detain him and went on down the line. His interest in the work flagged and he found himself forcing his attention back to it with a kind of grim fury time after time. The morning developed into a struggle between his indomitable will and the soul-sickness that was consuming him. Before the men he strove doggedly to create the illusion of his expected forceful, cheery manner, and at the same time was repressing a maddened annoyance at certain trifling faults in the work that he would never have noticed in his normal state.

Repression and control: upon them seemed to hang the salvation of his life, the success of the work, the happiness of all. This thought was almost an obsession. It had grown upon him gradually, just as that intangible weight settling upon his shoulders had grown heavier with each passing day. Could he keep his trust to the end, he wondered?

One night after supper he sat at the desk in the office, pencil and paper in hand, going over Barry's ledger. A number of other men were in the room gathered about the stove talking and smoking. There was a penny out somewhere in the accounts, and, as Bream chased it up one page and down the other, he thought whimsically of Barry's dream. Eloise had told him of that. Idly he recalled how

she had looked when she told it, how her eyes had laughed and her sweet red lips been parted; he recalled the dark blue dress she had worn, coloured here and there with red velvet, and the red velvet bandeau about her soft, luminous hair; recalled too just where she had sat, the gestures she had made occasionally as she knitted, every word she had said; in short the whole interview. A dull, narcotic peace stole over him as he fed his imagination; time was obliterated and he existed in a detached, nebulous world of his own.

A sudden guffaw of laughter from the others at one of Allan's stories brought him back to himself with a start, and he looked confusedly at the tall column of figures before him. His mouth set determinedly and he bent over the book, every muscle and nerve tense with concentration.

For a time he worked successfully. Then an item of seventeen cents charged against Pierre for tobacco and matches brought his birthday vividly before him and the memory of the red muffler which had yet to be worn. And when he discovered himself in this revery he jerked out of it scowling and biting his lips, cursing himself for a half-witted schoolboy. Such was the state of his mind that, in the end, he failed to locate the missing penny and gave up the task. Lighting his pipe he joined the group about the stove as a refuge from the dreams that haunted him.

In the course of conversation Dorlon brought up the subject of the layout of the work for the next day, usually the final discussion before turning in. As always he consulted Bream:

"How about that number three loading gang,

chief? We figgered last night it might be better to split it up and put 'bout ha'af the men road monkeyin'. If we do, what'll we do with the rest of 'em?"

For a minute Bream looked puzzled. Then his face cleared slightly.

"Oh, yes, I remember we *did* speak of that." . . . He stopped, struggling desperately with his treacherous memory. "Let me see . . . let me see . . . Look here, I'm sure I gave directions about it." He looked at the foreman almost in appeal.

"Not to me," the other disclaimed. "I ain't heard nothin'."

Taken aback, Bream's face darkened as his colour mounted. Grimly, almost savagely, he fought for his former instant mastery of such a situation.

"Well, now—I *know* I said something to somebody about that number three gang. Was it you, Allan?"

"Yes. This morning you said you thought that half the gang should be put on the road and the others should split and go up the travoys looking for dead wood. We're getting pretty low out front."

"Oh, yes, I remember now. Thanks. Do that, Dorlon. And by the way, I suppose they'll want horses. Can you spare a horse for each party?"

The foreman looked nonplussed and, after a moment, Allan again interposed:

"Oh, yes, that will be all right, Dick," he said. "Jimmie tells me that Barney and Joe can come out of the stable to-morrow."

For a while the discussion went on and then, after a period of awkward silence, Mackenzie rose yawning audibly.

"Well, boys, me for the hay," he remarked and opened the door.

"Same here," rejoined the others and straggled out after him.

When beyond ear-shot Dorlon turned to Allan:

"What's the matter with the chief?" he asked, his thick forehead corrugated. "I never seen him like this before."

"Nor I," replied Mackenzie. "He used to be a wizard at managing the gangs, but now he doesn't even know where they are. There's something decidedly wrong with him."

"Lord, yes. It's got me beat," said Dorlon and, unenlightened, went on to the bunk-house.

Though Mackenzie had spoken with intentional evasiveness there was much of genuine surprise in his reply, for he was totally unaware of Bream's actual mental state. To his eyes, during these last weeks, the man had apparently conquered his secret passion.

Ever since that conversation in the office when Eloise had playfully chided him Bream had been outwardly changed, had presented a more normal aspect to the world. This was a result, partly, of fear that he had betrayed himself; and, partly, of pride. With a resolution that can be found only at the heart of true manhood, he had bound himself with a vow of steel to restore to his association with the Mackenzies that air of delightful friendship that had characterised it early in the summer. This course offered him a last honourable method of life and he set about it with a fixity of purpose bordering on fanaticism. Like an anchorite of old, crushing all natural hope and longing into dust, he grew to glory in the pain he suffered.

And he succeeded. His moroseness disappeared and gave place to an unfailing cheerfulness. He

laughed and talked seemingly as of old. He played checkers with Eloise of an evening or drank tea with her of a stormy afternoon. He read to her and walked with her occasionally and bantered with her. And, between times, he accomplished prodigies of herculean labour during which he forgot to eat, and at night found to his great detriment that he could not sleep.

This attitude he maintained so doggedly and with such success that Mackenzie, watching him narrowly and hopefully, came to believe that the passion of the man's life had died a natural death.

Only Bream himself knew the fallacy of this supposition, but even he did not comprehend fully the toll that his resolution was asking of his life. Commanding every act by his tremendous and unbreakable will, he had gradually vitiated his splendid strength of mind and body. Preyed upon night and day by this vampire, he had wasted like one consumed by some slow, insidious poison. He suffered a sleeping-sickness of the soul.

Aside from this relentless necessity for struggle but few actualities had penetrated his consciousness. One of these was that some change had come over Allan. What it was or what had brought it about he did not know; he was only aware of the fact. Vaguely he divined that Mackenzie was a reversed man. Where before he had been sullen he was constantly amiable, where too free in his association with the men, now reserved, considerate where he had been selfish, responsible where irresponsible.

This knowledge came first to Dick as a result of their closer business relationship for, as he, struggling impotently, had gradually lost his hold, Allan had more

and more assumed control, supplying as well as he could, the executive ability and foresight that had once been his partner's peculiar endowment.

Well it was that Bream had crucified himself when he did, for that interview in the office which had so powerfully affected two lives had raised a faint disturbance upon the serene surface of a third.

Eloise had left Dick that day vaguely aware of a new, personal significance in his manner. The feeling was not even a suspicion, so evanescent and unlooked for was it. Rather it was the fleeting intuition of an unstained soul, like the shadow of a hawk's wing upon snow.

But because she was genuinely without the superficial vanity that seeks admiration, she condemned the intuition as an evidence of her own imperfection of thought, feeling herself guilty of an injustice to the man whom it concerned.

"He do that?" she questioned, slowly, and then shook her head in absolute negation. "Not he. Any other man, perhaps, but not he!" And she put the thought from her with the instinctive repulsion of a delicate nature.

And, just as Bream had thrown the fleeting shadow across her life, so had he dissipated it by his subsequent actions. The friendship that in her belief moved him to bring Allan into the wilderness had reappeared, apparently restored to its old footing, and the new happiness of her life had continued unbroken.

The change in Dick's appearance disturbed her deeply, but she laid it to the demands of the work which, owing to the unusually heavy snows, were unceasing. And in this, with ready discernment, he confirmed her, explaining the necessity for it and

forcing upon her a silent but unwilling acceptance of the situation.

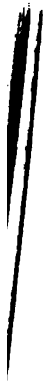
Another matter too—the startling change in Allan—gave her much food for thought. Where in Bream's case its appearance had been registered by an unanalysed feeling, in hers it became a vital fact, due to its manifestation in every action of his life.

Not because she did not feel deeply, but because hers was an ordered life of the spirit, unstirred by the undercurrents of deep significance and tragedy that swirled about her, she could not know by what means the alchemy had been wrought in her husband. That it had rested fundamentally on the fear of losing her would never have crossed her mind.

In truth she laid it to the reactionary influences of his enforced stay in the Y, the hard work in the open air, the responsibility that had fallen upon him, and the fact that his perverted talents had found vent in the exercise of a natural ambition.

Whatever the cause she saw the effect and rejoiced in it, feeling that an old contention of her own,—that under certain favourable circumstances Allan would reform—had been proven. The benefits to herself in peace of mind and higher standards of daily intercourse were many, but these were not what brought the keenest satisfaction. Chiefly she was glad for Allan, recognising that, in this new way of life, he was happier than he had ever been. And in her delicate woman's way she let him understand her appreciation of this.

"Oh, if he had always been like this," she often thought regretfully. "What life could have meant to him! What he could have made of himself! What he could have accomplished!" And then her thoughts



So, with each life working
end in obedience to laws
passed into weeks and the
its close.

CHAPTER XVII

"TWIN HALVES OF A PERFECT HEART"

"Y A-AS'M," said Pete Rolfe one day as the aristocracy sat at dinner, "they's spring in the air. Fer a week past the boys've been filin' the 'corks' of their boots an' fixin' up the wanigan. Pretty soon we'll hear the water noises, an' then we'll set up half the night alongside o' the rollways waitin' fer someone to yell:—'She's movin', boys! She's goin' out!' Them's the great days, Mis' Mackenzie. They're like a kid's Christmas mornin' to us, 'cause once we can git on the river, we're Goddlemighty sartin there's a town along it somewheres, an' that we'll strike it sure as death an' taxes if we keep goin' long enough."

"Say, Pete, you had better take to the stage instead of pulling teeth," remarked Bream drily. "That was a regular speech, telling all about the glorious spring-time in a lumber camp. Continue! Resume!"

Rolfe blushed and poised his fork with recently acquired grace.

"Mebbe ye wun't believe it but I git talkative this-a-way every year just afore the ice goes out. I could set up all night gassin'—I could fer a fact."

"Well, you'd better not try it if you value your sweet young life," put in Mackenzie, looking up from his engagement with half a dried-apple pie. "I'd hate to raise a tombstone over you that said, 'Here

lies a cook that might have been a good dentist only he asphyxiated himself with his own gas.' That wouldn't put any stars in your crown."

"Nor any crowns on teeth either," rejoined Bream, and Rolfe rolled his eyes helplessly.

They were all in good humour for the late March day had brought to camp the first balmy breath that prophesied spring. Although the temperature had been high for almost a week past, the mingled rain and snow had kept the air dank and chill with the poison of winter's last illness. To-day there was a sense in everyone of quickening desire and stirring ambition balked and warred against by lassitude. Hope and joy and good-will seemed suddenly to have sprung up like crocuses on a lawn.

Only Eloise maintained energy against the relaxing warmth.

"I *must* get into the woods to-day!" she cried, as they drank the last of their tea. "I want to go and plan all the new spring decorations: how the trees will look when the snow is gone, and the rocks and creeks and hills and lakes. And speaking of lakes, that reminds me, Dick Bream, that you have never yet taken me to Moonstone Lake as you promised. Let's go this afternoon."

"But the rollways—" he protested foolishly, dreading the jaunt. "I wonder if they will be all right?"

"Probably not, being very young rollways, but still there are Allan and two foremen to look after them," she retorted commiseratingly.

"You're elected, Dick," shouted Allan when the laughter had subsided. "Show the lady all the desirable villa plots."

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Half an hour later they set out on snowshoes, the girl garbed in the usual yellow buckskin dress, high leggings, mackinaw, and round fur cap perched on top of her shapely head. Her hands were mittened, and around her waist was tied a vivid scarlet sash of knitted wool, worn only because it gratified her delight in seeing the dazzling colour against the snow.

Leaving the lower end of the camp they tramped straight south along what had been a travoy trail for hauling wood. Presently this came to an end and they turned off to the east through the virgin forest, skirting prickly berry thickets, dodging under tree limbs, and leaping across tiny water-courses whose ice had begun to rot.

Finally, when they had topped a long hill, the girl, sank down on a fallen log to regain her breath. Bream, himself glad of the rest, leaned panting against a tree.

"Moonstone Lake! It's a beautiful name, I think," she said. "Is it a translation from the Indian?"

"Yes. Albert, an Ojibway half-breed who runs a trap line through here, told me about it. I met him once last fall when I was up this way for deer. There is a legend that one night when some monstrosity of a hero or other was shooting across the sky, a blue moonstone dropped out of his knife-hilt and fell into the woods. Of course, like many legends, the obvious fact of nature provided the inspiration and the story was built to fit the lake. . . . In summer one can see the resemblance to the name because it is perfectly round and of a bluish-grey colour, but now there is really not much to see."

"How unpoetic you are, and on a day like this!"

she exclaimed, her voice trailing off. . . . Then, pointing with one hand, "Dick, there are two king-birds, the first of the year! See, on that maple-tree! The tip-top limb! Oh, the darlings!"

"By Jove, they are!" he whispered eagerly, as he caught sight of the white and brown, regally crested, little songsters. "Let's go on. Perhaps we'll see a robin or a bluebird in the woods. Spring is coming, isn't it?"

The lake, as Bream had said, was perfectly circular and not a furlong in width. All about it the forest stalked down to the very edge, blank and tall and sinister-looking except where the sun struck across the easterly side. There it was dark green and gold.

"It is a disappointment, isn't it?" said the girl, looking across the frozen expanse from the end of the trail. "We'll have to come again when the ice is out. But it is lovely and warm here in the sun. And *springy*. Oh, how good to know that winter is almost over! There are certain scents to-day from the bark or the melting snow that take me back to the time when I was a little girl."

"Exactly! I've known just that experience!" he exclaimed. "A single trace of a familiar odour and a scene I have forgotten for years will come into my mind as vividly as if I had just been there. It happens most often in the spring, I think, when everything is fresh and keen and new."

Unlacing her snowshoes she sat down comfortably on a broad flat stone from which the snow had melted, and made room for him beside her. Then the weariness incidental to a long walk in the unaccustomed warmth made itself felt, and languor stole over them both. They remained silent, gradually quickening

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to the pulse of new life that had commenced to throb all about them, feeling vaguely the rebirth and the resurrection of all things vital.

To Bream, tall, gaunt, the relentless master of himself, the feelings awakened in him were torture. They rent open wounds that he had believed closed forever; they bore him down with an immense despair that flaunted the futility of self-mastery and honour, those empty baubles for which he had striven so long. Desire—the desire that lifts the lark soaring to the blue heavens and causes the nightingale to burst his little heart in song—surged in him. But this he put away, knowing that only the ashes of it and not the fulfilment could ever be his. Yet there was less of bitterness in the fact, he thought, with her there beside him. Spring was coming now. What of the time when she should be gone?

As if by telepathic communication they seemed to be musing on kindred subjects for she said, unexpectedly: "Won't it be jolly to see Hampton again, Dick, when we're through at Abimoming—the big, red mills and the booms all full of brown logs. And Dr. Cavanaugh. Oh, it's going to be a wonderful spring and summer! You boys are going to drive your logs and fulfil your contracts and make money and then buy a lot more land up here and become 'lumber barons.'"

"It would be the sensible thing to do," he admitted, smiling. "However, there's considerable to be accomplished before that. The prospect of the drive down a new river has cost me a fair amount of sleep already."

She was studying the clear-cut profile of his face and saw in his smile an expression that had come into it more and more of late, an expression combining

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great strength of purpose with a sweetness of soul that was the outward sign of his inward victory—though she did not know this. And now, added to this sweetness, there was a kind of wistfulness that drew her heart-strings.

She looked into his eyes as he talked and discovered there unconcealable pain, and her nature melted with a mysterious fire. She thought: "O Dick, Dick! What has happened? What is it?"

Aloud she said with mock severity: "But before you buy land or do anything else, young man, you will take a vacation. I shall make Dr. Cavanaugh prescribe one for you. And if you won't take it alone, Allan and I will come with you and see that you *do* take it. Oh, Dick, really I'm serious. You look terribly. You mustn't think of working after the drive. Promise me you will rest and take care of yourself."

He thought for a few moments.

"Yes, I promise," he said. "I think we shall all need a rest after the drive."

In his secret heart he had set that event as the goal past which his fortitude must bear him.

"And next winter we'll all come back," she went on with mounting enthusiasm, "ready to conquer the world! I'm sure you and Allan can contract to deliver fifteen million feet; at least he says so. And as long as he won't let me teach school or stay in town during the winter, I've already planned a dozen improvements for the camp.

"First, please, I want an addition built to our cabin, and more furniture. After the drive I expect to buy beautiful warm curtains and pillows and animal skins and things, and perhaps wall paper if the

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men can put up smooth board sheathing inside the logs. . . .

"And the bunk-house, too—I've been thinking about that; wondering if we couldn't make it a little more comfortable for the men. Really, I don't see how they stand it in that cold, draughty place with only one stove and practically no light. Now if we could only build another big shack with plenty of lamps in it, and a smooth floor for dancing, and a raised place at one end where Edward O'Duffy could play his accordion, and have all the old magazines—what are you laughing at, Dick Bream?"

"Your blessed uplift movement," he chuckled. "If you want to ruin a lumber camp make it into a Y. M. C. A. But I do approve of the dancing floor. The men must have their dance now and then or there will be trouble. But, see here, Eloise, though it's delightful to count our chickens, we must remember there is still a lot of ice on which we can slip and break the eggs. A great deal may happen between here and Abimoming. And afterwards, too, for that matter."

She sobered at the light reproof, and knitted her brows as if some new thought had come to her. Then after a moment she said, casting aside her light manner: "Dick, you've seen the change in Allan, haven't you?"

"Yes." Of late it had become more and more noticeable to him.

"I—I think it means that his life will be different after this. I don't believe he will ever fail again. He is too happy as he is now. And—Dick, I want to ask you something. . . . Will you let him come back here next winter? . . . back here as your partner? It will give him something to pull him over next summer. . . .

For he *may* need help then, and I want to be ready with it if he does."

Bream looked intently at the dirty snow around the edge of the rock upon which they sat, his mind slowly grasping what she had said. Of course she did not realise the immense thing she was asking of him, he thought. Could he promise her that? He had not even looked so far himself. And yet, could he deny her anything whose granting would bring the light of happiness to her eyes?

Soothed by the sound of her voice and her satisfying presence, the throbbing vacillation of the argument gradually stilled, and he commenced to think of her rather than of himself.

"It is horrible for me to ask anything else of you," she was saying, "after all you have already done for us—Allan and me! I do not need to tell you what I owe you, and that I can never repay it. . . . But think of it in this way, Dick: The good work is half done. . . . Shan't we finish it? Shan't we make it as fine a thing as we can?"

"Yes," he answered, this time without hesitation.

The balm that she always brought to him was stealing over his soul; a balm that in the end was no more than an unconscious, warm appreciation of what he had done and was doing, and a vital inspiration to cling to his purposes and ideals. Here, close to Eloise's heart and understanding, he found what every man seeks and needs in the one woman of his life—peace and the invigorating impulsion to the expression of all that is best in him.

There was silence for a few moments. Her eyes filled with tears of gratitude. Never had this man failed her. Always he gave unstintingly of himself

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and what was his to the betterment of alien lives—hers and Allan's. In sickness and in health he was the same, divining her feelings and desires instantly and without argument, seeming to catch the voices of unvoiced longings with the intuition of perfect spiritual accord.

"Oh Dick, you are good!" she said simply. "And because you are so good you have made life good to me. Can you understand when I say that you have given me back things I thought I had lost, and proved to me things I had come to believe were only myths? . . . But it is so, has always been so with you. . . . Now, whatever may happen, I shall know that these things *do* exist, for I have seen them and touched them and had them in my life. . . . And they have made me better. Do you understand what I am trying to tell you, Dick? I know you do. . . . And I know you will forgive me for telling it."

"Yes, if you ask forgiveness." His voice was tender, gentle, and though his eyes were misty the pain had gone out of them. Now they held a lambent, serene flame of exaltation that seemed to light his whole face, softening it of its hard, pinched look and making it appear infinitely gentle.

There was no longer any struggle of the senses in him, no clamouring of starved lips and aching arms that must claim their own. That had been stilled by her sacred presence, purged from him in the white fire of a loftier passion. Only remained a high sense of the worth-whileness of all that he had undergone, a certification and seal upon his suffering. It was a supreme moment of reward and he experienced in it a still, pure bliss whose glory transcended any physical joy he could ever know.

"Why should I not tell you?" she went on as though returning from some far land of thought. "You have understood everything else, you will understand this. Spring is coming—I feel as if it were here—and the long winter I dreaded so has been the happiest since my marriage. You have accomplished everything you set out to accomplish—and what I have prayed for and desired so long has come to pass. Oh Dick, I knew it would. . . . Things *do* come if one *knows* they will! They come somehow, though we can never foresee the agency. I believe it, Dick, I do believe it!"

"Yes," he replied with unswerving, strong faith, "they do come sometime—in this life—or another—but they come."

"And you have brought mine. Because Dan Silver fought Allan you came into my life and raised it from disgrace and unhappiness to honour and happiness. How strange it all is. . . . Little do we know who in all the world may bring us priceless gifts."

"And so it behooves us," he smiled whimsically, "to be good to all the world."

"Yes, to be good to all the world." Her voice trailed off gently. "What a simple thought it is, and yet how hard to fulfil. But it is a true thought, and you have lived it, Dick."

"If I have it is only because I knew that you knew—and appreciated."

Silence fell between them, one of those silences in which mind blends with mind and spirit with spirit; in which there is exquisite union of complementary natures. There was no touch of hands, no thought beyond the thought of friendship, yet was there a com-

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munion as perfect as the unfolded clasp of a double flower.

Bream, comforted, ennobled, inhabited a world of strange, unreal beauty in which there was no place for speech or thought. It was a radiant world, luminous with a golden haze and peaceful like a heart at rest. And into it, presently, as he sat there motionless, stunned with loveliness, came music: three plaintive notes, a liquid trill and a wild, sweet cadence abandoned at its climax.

There was a fragrant pause and it came again, sweeter, more piercing, more abandoned. And from somewhere deep in the forest, staccato flute-notes answered it, warm, throbbing, sensuous, against the bleak, white wilderness.

"Dick, listen!" breathed the girl raptly, "the first spring warblers!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A FUGITIVE IN THE DARK

HALF an hour before sunset they returned to camp, tired and subdued, but silent sharers of an exquisite memory. He left her at the cabin and, declining tea with her since he thought she might wish to rest, returned to the office. There he poured himself a dish of the strong beverage from the granite pot on the stove and stood thinking.

He felt strong, satisfied, courageous, and, for the moment, his long inert passion for the work returned to him. He recalled clearly for the first time in weeks the exact situation in regard to it. Everything appeared to be in excellent shape, ready for the drive, in fact, as soon as the frost should relax its icy grip on the rivers. Nearly eleven million feet had been cut and he knew that Krug & Lableau would buy it all, being a new firm tapping a new territory.

It had been a rather satisfactory winter's work, taking it all together. Only the harnessing of the river stood between the firm and success, and Borwell had told him that the channel was not extraordinarily difficult. The firm's outlook appeared favourable clear to the end.

With his feet on the dull, nickelled railing around the stove and his pipe in his mouth, Bream considered every aspect and found it good.

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All this was normal and wholesome and as it should have been but for one thing: Bream was still exalted, still stimulated to the highest pitch by the events of the afternoon. In other words his formerly normal state was now his exalted one, and his present normal state was one of devitalised mind and body. As yet he still lingered on the heights. . .

Then, gradually, as he sat there, the afflatus that had sustained him commenced to ebb, and the room became peopled with the dark shapes that so long had been his nightly companions. He commenced to feel cold, anæmic, depressed. His brow contracted into an unrelaxing knot and, shivering, he crouched nearer to the crackling stove.

With all the resistance at his command he sought to check the downward swing of his spirits, but the reaction was predestined and it conquered him irresistibly. Because he had dwelt with such ecstasy upon the heights the fall was correspondingly greater, and it bore him down to the uttermost depths like Lucifer hurled into hell. And because he had known so completely the rarefied atmosphere of the spirit, the inseparable demands of the flesh came upon him in the form of his never-ended craving for her whom he loved.

He sprang up and commenced to pace the floor. An uncontrollable loneliness surged through him, accompanied by a feeling of imminent tears. His hands craved the touch of her hands, his arms ached for the feel of her in their clasp, his hungry lips awakened to the full comprehension of their starvation.

"Oh, my beloved! My beloved!" he cried, stopping in his walk to lean weakly on the back of one

of his grotesque chairs. "Oh Eloise! Eloise!" His hands gripped the wood until it seemed as if the knuckles would burst the skin. His face was leaden grey like a death-mask and his forehead glittered with the sweat of his despair. And because he had fallen so far, he was deaf now to the feeble, forgotten call of the heights he had left. He thought of them with a snarl, and viewed their shining summits with a curse.

Then a blind fury against the thwarting of his life shook him.

"Damn it, do they think I'm a god?" he cried, striding up and down again swiftly. "Why was this given me? Why couldn't I be like other men? I've never done anything to deserve this, and yet evil men can have all the things that are denied to me. Damn such a rotten system! *Damn it, I say!*" . . .

He halted, instinctively aware that such ranting gained him nothing. Then regret for his outburst swayed him, and, with that, he sank down upon the edge of his bunk, weak, apathetic, lost in a coma of resistlessness. His frayed nerves were quivering now like taut wires and his muscles twitched involuntarily.

Voices and the tramping of feet outside indicated that the men had come in from work, but he did not hear them. Barry opened the door suddenly and Bream leaped to his feet beside himself with nervousness.

"Get out of here!" he yelled, wild-eyed, and the little scaler, seeing the whites of those eyes in the dark, backed away frightened, drawing the door after him. Then he hurried off to find Mackenzie.

Galvanised into activity, Bream's mind seethed

again. In a momentary flash there came to it a disjointed recollection of his conversation that afternoon with Eloise. He had promised to keep Allan in partnership, promised to come back to this isolated hole next winter. And *she* would be here!

His fists tightened spasmodically at his sides and his indrawn breath whistled between his teeth. God, he couldn't do that! Had he lost his reason entirely when he promised it? His hands vaguely sought his forehead and pressed it, striving to subdue its wild throbbing. Another winter like this? The nightmare prospect seemed haunted by a gibbering host of tortures. Another winter like this? No! No! Death first. The structure of his strength and resolution, undermined by long months of repression, crumbled down upon him like an avalanche. And in the overwhelming ruin something snapped. . . .

Another winter like this? No! nor another month, nor day, nor hour. The end had come. He could endure it no longer.

A swift determination took possession of him. A moment of fumbling and he struck a match and lighted a lamp. Next, he stepped quickly to his bunk and from beneath it dragged his "turkey" or clothes-roll. This he spread out on the floor. In it, with a few other treasures, he saw the red muffler that Eloise had knitted for his birthday and, stabbed by a pang of agony, he gathered it in his hands and pressed it passionately to his lips. Then, putting it gently aside, he commenced to make rapid journeys to and from the row of nails upon which hung his clothes, throwing the garments down regardless of order.

Then, suddenly, he became aware that the door

had opened and, glancing up, he saw Allan standing by the counter staring at him.

"What are you doing, Dick?" asked the other curiously. "What's the matter with you? Barry just told me you ordered him out of the office. Any trouble?"

"Yes, there's trouble! Too much of it! And I'm not going to stand it any longer!" Bream moistened his lips. "Shut that door and fix it so nobody can get in. Then come here. I've something to say to you!" His voice was unnatural, rapid, high, with the timbre of a wire stretched to the uttermost.

Instantly Mackenzie knew that something was gravely wrong, for it was plain that Bream was at the breaking point; but what had brought about the situation he could not imagine. For only a moment he hesitated. Then, smiling, as if humouring a child, he locked the door by turning two stout wooden buttons at top and bottom, and crossed the room towards his partner.

"Look here, what are you putting all your clothes in that turkey for?" he demanded. "One would think you were 'going out,' to look at you. Let me help you hang them up again, that's a good chap." He reached out for a garment in Bream's hand but the other threw it angrily on the pile before him.

"Let 'em alone!" he commanded in a white fury. "And you listen to me! I *am* going away from here and I'm going to-night, now, just as soon as I can pack up. And I'll keep on going till I can never see this cursed hell-hole again, or hear the name of it, or even think of it. I'm——"

"Man, man, you're crazy!" broke in Allan, seriously aroused. "What are you talking about? You

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can't go away from here to-night, Dick! What's come over you? Let's get at this thing."

Bream snorted scornfully and went on in the same high, thin voice, speaking very rapidly:

"No, I'm not crazy but I ought to be! I've gone through enough to be crazy! For months I've lived in torture here and you've never known, nobody's known. Worked like a horse all day and laid awake all night, that's what I've done! In the last week I haven't had nine hours sleep altogether. And that's just a sample. Do you wonder I'm half-mad?" He pressed his hands to his head, his feverish eyes fixed on his partner. "Why shouldn't I be crazy? But I'm not. I'm just done with everything, that's all. I'm going to get out of here. You can take things over! Shut up! *I am* I tell you!" . . . He sought to concentrate his seething mind. . . . "Seems to me the business is all right. There's only the drive yet, and Borwell and Dorlon are good men. . . . Oh hell, I can't think! . . . It's all yours—all this;" he swept his arm in a swift circle. "I'm done, I tell you, and you've got to look out for it! . . .

"Allan, I mean this!" His voice was less agonised now as if the very assault upon the flood-gates of long-maintained repression had brought him relief. "I'm going on a long trail. You'll never see me again—any of you. Don't oppose me, don't argue with me! Help me.

"Go down to the storehouse and get me some grub—enough for a month. Do you hear me?" His fists clenched. "What are you standing there for? *I'm in a hurry!*"

Mackenzie shrank back for a moment and then a new combativeness revealed itself.

"I won't do it, Dick," he said stubbornly. "I won't

let you go! I won't listen to any more such rot. . . . Leave me all this!"—he imitated Bream's gesture—"Twaddle and poppy-cock! You know I couldn't manage it if you did leave it. Now, what's the matter with you? That's what I want to get at. You're going on here like a madman, without a single good reason that I can make out."

"Ha!" barked Bream with bitter staccato laughter. "Ha! ha! You won't let me go! Ha! ha! Oh, yes you will! You'll help me fast enough when you know the reason. You'll get the grub and you'll say it's a fine night for travel. Ha! ha!" He commenced to struggle with his "turkey," kneeling on the floor and looking up at Mackenzie with bared teeth. . . .

"Maybe it's my fault; maybe I wasn't man enough to live in hell for the rest of my life! . . . Maybe it's your fault; maybe you weren't man enough to come up here and take your medicine alone. Ah! What's the matter with you?" as Mackenzie started back, white to the lips.

"So—that's—it!" breathed Allan almost inaudibly, his mind bearing up gradually under the shock. And then as if to himself: "I thought that had passed long ago."

"Ha! You knew it then. Good! I wanted you to know it, all of it from first to last. And I'm telling you because I can't tell her and there's no one else to tell, and because I don't care a damn what you do about it. Here!" Bream fumbled in a leather holster that lay on the floor and tossed a revolver on the bunk near Mackenzie. "Shoot me! I deserve it. I'll be glad of it!"

For a moment Mackenzie regarded his distraught partner in stupefied amazement. Then he said:

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"If you weren't so clearly unbalanced, Dick, I would say you were acting. I tell you I discovered all about this a long while ago and became convinced that you had got over it. If I had been going to do any shooting I'd have done it then, not now. But let's not talk about it. Try and control yourself. . . ."

"I *will* talk about it! You've got to understand! Control myself! Haven't I controlled myself until I'm almost insane? Do you think I'm superhuman? Now *you* control yourself, if you can! . . .

"I spared you at Hampton because she asked it, because I couldn't refuse her. . . . It had begun then. But you wouldn't come up here alone. You were selfish and ugly . . . I thought I was man enough to face the situation and crush the thing that had got hold of me. I wasn't afraid when you forced me to bring her along.

"But I failed. Great God, how could I win? Somewhere else it might have been possible, but up here, a hundred miles from anywhere—so close to each other! . . . Every day the thing grew, and every day I fought it. I worked in the woods like a galley slave. I tried to divert my thoughts, but it was no use. . . .

"Allan, I'm one of the kind that can love only once. . . . I found myself getting weaker and weaker until I was afraid she would know. Then I pulled myself together and stood out to save her—at least in appearance. You think I'm acting now, but I'm not. It was *then* I was acting.

"And all the time something was killing me inside. I got so I couldn't remember—couldn't think. One day before the men a little top log broke me. My mind and body were going, but did it make any difference? No. I *couldn't* care what became of the business. My only

thought was to stick it out till the drive was over, and I kept counting the days, *making* myself stick it out, believing that nobody would know. . . .

"Then, to-day, I promised that our partnership would go on next year and that we should all be up here together again. She asked it and how could I refuse? . . . Then when I realised what I had done . . . the folly, the impossibility of it all came over me. I can't do it, Allan! Another winter here when I can't endure it another second? Oh! . . . Oh! . . . I'm going, I tell you! I'm going!"

The last words he all but shouted and Allan, his face white, raised his hand warningly. Bream stopped, panting, his whole frame tense with the high pitch of his feelings. Then, during the silence that ensued, he gradually relaxed. The wild outburst of passion, the utter abandonment after his long repression, had brought him relief. Normality commenced to assert itself.

"I had no idea it was like this, Dick," said Macenzie at last, deeply moved. "No idea it was like this." He sank down into a chair, glimpsing vaguely between the other's spoken words the vast, unvoiced suffering that had caused them. "Oh Dick, I'm sorry!"

"Don't be sorry! It's past that." Bream's voice was quieter now. "Just help me. That's all I want. I've failed, but there's a chance for all of us yet."

Suddenly Allan burst out:

"But I won't have you go, Dick, *you* who have done all this." He indicated the camp. "Here is your life work, here is your company, here is your money. We have come in here and driven you out of it. *We'll* go! *We'll* go to-night. I'll say something; give some excuse, but *we'll* go."

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He sprang to his feet but Bream's outflung arms arrested him.

"You go and leave me here?" he cried, almost panic-stricken. "You'll not! Do you think I would stay a minute longer in this place? I hate it. I hate every log in it; every tree, every foot of ground! There's nothing here but turns me sick with loathing. I wouldn't stay here if I was to find a million dollars to-morrow. I can't stand it, I tell you. I won't stay. Do you want to kill me?"

Abstractedly Mackenzie walked to the stove, lifting and setting down one after another the things that stood on it with a little clatter that sounded loud in the silence. Then he turned to his partner who had risen and was leaning his head upon his hand while his elbow rested in the upper bunk.

"But Dick, be reasonable. At least give yourself the benefit of a second thought. Sleep on this; wait until to-morrow before you decide finally; think again before you take this step."

Bream turned his head and his eyes narrowed menacingly.

"Look here, Allan," he said in an ugly tone, "are you just an idiot or can't you understand English? Do you suppose I've told you all this to amuse you or to amuse myself; to make an impression on you with the idea of letting you dissuade me from my purpose? God, what do you think I am? A hypocrite and a liar as well as dishonourable?" With eyes flashing now he spat forth his ultimatum, pounding the edge of the bunk at every word: "I'm going now! And I'm going for good! I never want to see this hell-hole or any person in it again! Can—you—understand—that?"

Mackenzie lifted his eyes and studied for a full minute Bream's grey, contorted face. He saw at last the futility of reasoning with the man in his present state. He considered the problem carefully. Might it not be better for all concerned to let him go and trust to the reaction to bring him back? And yet it would be a difficult situation to face—like a mysterious death in a family—so much to explain, so much to endure in the way of gossip and suspicion. Moreover, there would be a very detrimental effect upon the men.

On the other hand, things being as they were, the sooner the break came the better. The tremendous gravity of the situation finally forced itself into Allan's mind. Not only self-preservation urged him; the desire to do the best thing for Dick was paramount in his swift deliberations. He could see that, for all concerned, a continuance of the present *status* was out of the question. And yet it grieved him sorely.

"Well, Dick," he said heavily at last, "I guess you had better go. For your own sake I say it, not for ours. We have no right here; we have ruined your life, and I would be willing to be turned out penniless to-night if it would bring you back any of the happiness you have lost. But I see it could do no good and I shall say no more. If I can do anything command me."

"You have your store-house key?"

"Yes."

"Go down there and get me enough flour and beans and tea and stuff to last me a month. You know how much; you've travelled."

"Yes."

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Allan started towards the door and then halted uncertainly as the supper-bell rang.

"Now's our time," said Bream hoarsely. "Wait till the men get in and then go for the grub. I want to be off by the time the second half is finished."

When Allan returned the "turkey" was ready and Bream was busy with the duffle bag.

"There's a lot I ought to know about the business before you go, Dick," said Allan. "Now, the drive——"

"Borwell and Dorlon will take care of that. All you'll have to do will be to supply the brains now and then. You've done that for so many weeks already I guess you can do it for a few more." Bream was packing feverishly, excitedly, eager to be away now that his full heart had been spoken.

The wide, free, air-sweet, open spaces of the long trail seemed to be calling to him with soft promises of easement like the allure of an earthly Nirvana. A long-forgotten verse suddenly repeated itself over and over in his brain.

"Under the wide and starry sky
Dig the grave and let me lie:
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will."

It sounded like a triumphant battle-song to him now, voicing as it did the spirit of his mood. He was done with men and their lives and their ways. Under a wide and starry sky his life should work itself out to its appointed end and then he would lay him down with a will, more glad perhaps to see the end than the slow approach of it.

"Now if we come through to the mills all right,"

Allan broke in upon him, "and deliver the logs according to contract, there ought to be several thousand apiece in it for us after all expenses. Now what shall I do? Where shall I send your share to reach you?"

"Don't send it. I never want to see it. Put it in the Sawpits Bank to my account and let it stay there. And go on with the business, Allan. It's a good business. Put your money into more land. It'll make you rich some day, and when it does you can put my twenty thousand back with my profits. Or never take it out, I don't care."

"But you, Dick, who have done so much for me and would do this—" Allan choked—"To have nothing, not even the little money that is yours!"

"Money, hell!" said Bream vaguely, sitting back from the duffle bag, his face smooth and serene.

And as if chanted by some silvery voice, the remaining brave, melancholy lines rang in his ears:

"This be the verse you grave for me:
*Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.*"

Presently he sat on the edge of his bunk to strap on his snow-shoes, and, when this was done, he gently folded the red, knitted muffler about his neck and donned his cap and mittens.

"Don't go, Dick, for God's sake!" cried Allan vehemently. "I can't have you go out of my life this way!"

"Please, old man," said Dick gently, and then after a pause: "Give me a hand with this stuff."

"But where are you going? At least, tell me that!"

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"I don't know. South, I guess. I want to get away from the snow and the woods." He stood for a moment and then extended his hand. "I hold nothing against you, Allan, either for the present or the past," he said with sincere warmth.

Mackenzie seized the hand in both his own and wrung it, tears streaming down his face.

"Oh Dick! Good-bye, good-bye."

Their fingers parted and they went silently to the door. Bream reconnoitred for a moment and then slipped like a shadow into the deserted road. The next moment he was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

ALLAN COVERS THE TRAIL

FOR a few seconds Allan stood in an attitude of listening, half-afraid that he might hear the surprised challenge of old Jimmie or of one of the teamsters as Bream passed through the camp. But all remained still until it was plain that he had reached the forest unobserved.

Then Allan closed the door of the office and leaned upon the counter for a moment in an effort to collect himself. Now that the strain was removed he suddenly found that he was weak and very tired, and that his knees trembled under him.

Presently, still shaken but more himself, he straightened up and removed his mackinaw, mechanically preparing for dinner. He carried dippers of hot water from the tin pail on the stove to the sink behind the door and washed his face and hands. Meantime, into his mind had commenced to filter the full realization that Bream was gone.

Gone! Never to see him again, never again to hear that pleasant voice or look into those level grey eyes. It was incredible, inconceivable! It was——

He set his jaw and crushed down what might have been a mounting hysteria. This was no time nor place for personal feelings. There was too much to do, too much to meet and dispose. Drying his face on

the coarse roller-towel he prepared for his entrance at dinner. He knew that the second half was eating and that there would be immediate inquiries for Dick, especially since Barry had no doubt detailed fully the story of his ejection from the office.

How should he face their inquiries? How break the news?

To tell the full truth, of course, was out of the question, and yet Dick's going must be made plausible. . . . "Slicking" his hair lumberman style he deliberated with troubled heart. By the time he was ready he had reached a decision. He would stick as closely as possible to the facts but would leave the real reasons behind them unexplained.

Hating the deceit and yet anxious to keep dumb to the last moment the tongues of suspicion that must eventually wag, he could see no other course. Eventually the men and the world must think what they would, but not yet.

When he entered the dining-room he found Eloise, Rolfe, and Barry engaged as he had expected. With a look and touch of greeting he sat down beside his wife. His face still showed traces of his past emotion, and there was about him an air of restraint.

"Sorry to be late," he apologised quietly to the autocrat of the kitchen.

"That's all right," Rolfe nodded. "Chief coming?"

Allan, who had reached listlessly for the beans, let his hand fall.

"No," he said with an attempt at unconcern, "he won't be in to dinner to-night."

"He wun't? Why not?"

Mackenzie allowed a proper interval and then replied:

"Says he doesn't feel very well and doesn't want anything."

"I told you he wa'n't right," interjected Barry, wagging his head.

"Dick doesn't feel well?" asked Eloise with quick sympathy. "I'm sorry. What is the matter?"

"He has had a—er—sort of breakdown, I'm afraid," said Mackenzie, looking uncertainly at his wife.

"A breakdown!" she replied quickly, startled by the word. "What do you mean by a breakdown?"

"Oh," he faltered wretchedly, "he went all to pieces, ah—er—kind of collapsed."

"Allan!" This time her voice was thoroughly frightened and she sat back staring at her husband, the colour ebbing from her face. "Dick collapsed! But that is serious. I must go to him." She turned to the cook. "Pete, will you put some good things on a tray for Mr. Bream?"

"Wait!" cried Allan as Rolfe got up. For a moment he bit his lip, thinking. Clearly he was gaining nothing by this Fabian policy. Why, then, continue it? Why not breast the whole matter now as well as later? While they all waited he made his decision.

"No use bothering with a tray or anything of the kind. Dick won't touch it; he——"

"But why not, dear? He *must* eat. He can't go hungry all night."

"He won't touch it because he can't," said Mackenzie desperately. "He isn't here any longer. He has left the camp."

"What!"

"Where's he goin'?"

"Left the camp!"

"Yes, left the camp. He has started down to Abimoming to see a doctor."

A stunned, incredulous silence followed this announcement. Rolfe sank back heavily upon the bench, his jaw sagging. Little Barry posed with loaded knife in air. Eloise, endeavouring to grasp the fact, and at the same time the prey of conflicting emotions, said nothing.

Rolfe was the first to find speech.

"Sa-ay, Mr. Mackenzie, don't make me laugh," he advised with hoarse sarcasm. "*Him* with nervous collapses an' seein' doctors an' all *just at drive time!* I'll be the goat. What's the answer?"

"You can believe it or not as you like, but Mr. Bream has left the camp to go south and see a doctor. You don't think I'm saying this for fun, do you?"

"Needs it, I say," chimed in Barry, "after what he done to me! Ten doctors."

"Are you serious, Allan?"

"Never more so in my life. I've just been through an experience I wouldn't care to repeat. Without any warning he went all to pieces. It was quick as that!"—he snapped his fingers—"and once he had got started there was no stopping him! . . . Ugh! It was horrible!"

"Say, I'll believe you in a minute," said Rolfe, "if you keep that up."

"Do," said Allan drily, "it will be a credit to your remarkable intelligence," and went on with a less halting description of what had happened after Barry had come running to him before dinner.

Eloise ate no more but listened stunned, horrified, trying to grasp the facts of this inexplicable occurrence. Dick Bream ill—Dick with whom she had passed

such a wonderful afternoon? Ill and stumbling south somewhere out there in the dark and cold? It was unthinkable, heart-sickening. If she might only do something for him in his need!

"I tried to keep him," Allan was saying, his eyes fixed on the pine table. "I argued with him, plead with him, did everything but use force. But he wouldn't listen. He wasn't himself. . . . Really, you've no idea of his condition. He was like a man going insane. . . . Finally I found that the only thing to do was to help him, and I got him some grub and stuff and——"

"Wal, I'd never ha' thought it of the Chief, by thunder!" declared Rolfe, subdued. "Him the King of 'em all when it come to woods or river work. But I figger he'll still be able to git back fer the drive. A week more like this an' we'll go out a-roarin'. He'll bust a gut to be here fer that."

"I hope he does, ten of 'em," declared Barry, still unplacated.

"Aw, shut up, you runt," said the cook, "you talk too much. But why the devil didn't the Chief take the sledge an' go fer his tonic? He'd ha' done it in half the time."

Mackenzie started up from the table with a gesture of despair. He had eaten almost nothing.

"I don't know," he cried, "and you wouldn't either if you had been there. I tell you he was out of his mind, beside himself. The whole thing came as quick as a flash and took me off my feet. . . . But all the same I feel as if it might have been prevented. When I look back now I can see a lot that meant nothing to me before but was leading up to this all the time. For one thing he has been overworking all

winter—we've all seen that, and, besides, he couldn't sleep. I didn't know that until he told me, but I know it's enough to make anyone go off the handle even without any work."

"Wait till the boys hear of this," said Rolfe. "They'll never get over it! The Chief off his nut an' climbin' trees like a squir'l. He'll get a reception when he gits back, believe me!"

Allan put his wife's wrap over her shoulders and opened the door. "Have the foremen come to the office at half-past seven," he told Rolfe. "I want to talk over the work. Any of the others may come that wish to."

"All right, Mr. Mackenzie."

Eloise walked the short distance to the cabin in stunned silence. A wind roared with a great voice in the encompassing forest and swept down through the camp-clearing, cold and chill. The stars were veiled and there was a piercing dampness in the air that seemed to forecast rain. A feeling of unreality oppressed her that she strove in vain to shake off; a feeling that all this could not be true. Bream ill, unbalanced? . . . He, the strong, the calm, on whom they all unconsciously leaned? . . . But a few hours past he had left her at the cabin door, sane, natural, apparently happy, and now—since it *must* be true—he was alone out there in that bleak wilderness, possibly without a fire, certainly without any other comfort. . . .

Moved by a desire to help him in his dark hour, all the maternal instinct in her yearned towards him with pitying tenderness. Where was he now? Had he eaten anything? Would he take care of himself? Would he sleep any better out there than here where she longed to pour out her anxiety in service?

These and other thoughts thronged her brain, all a part of that sense of unreality that clung to her. There had taken possession of her a dull pain that would not cease, that obstructed her mind. It was as if the normal functions of the seat of life had been suspended for the moment. She assured herself that Bream had really gone, but was too numb to suffer from the fact.

Only one thing hurt her cruelly: that he had left without a word to her. Eager to forgive and excuse, she could yet not forgive nor excuse this. It was incomprehensible when they had been so close, in such perfect accord in all things.

In the cabin, anxious, hungering to see logical motives behind what had happened, she turned to her husband, her face colourless.

"Allan," she pleaded, "what was the matter with Dick? I can't understand his leaving like this. You said he had a nervous breakdown. Why *should* he have a nervous breakdown? This afternoon he was normal enough—more cheerful than usual if anything. He even talked about some changes he wanted to make in the camp next year, and about our all coming back here then. I can't conceive of this—this collapse. It seems an impossibility to me."

Mackenzie, startled by the intensity of her tone, thought carefully before he replied.

"I don't know how to put it any differently than I have," he said, sinking into a chair. "It was a result of his working too hard, I guess—you've often spoken of it yourself;—that and his being unable to sleep. Everything here had got on his nerves until he couldn't stand it any longer. He told me he loathed every tree and log and foot of ground in the camp and that he

wouldn't stay here another minute if he was to find a million dollars to-morrow. He was in a terrible state, dear, you have no idea how terrible!"

"But for him to break down, Allan, *nervously break down!* I can't understand it, I can't get used to it." She was walking slowly back and forth and now she turned her troubled eyes upon her husband. "I admit he has been working too hard, but that would bring on a physical breakdown. To have a nervous and mental collapse such as you describe there must have been something preying on his mind. Yet you haven't mentioned any such thing. Don't you see what I mean? There seems to be a link missing somewhere!"

"Now really, dear," said Allan slowly, "I think you are taking this whole incident much too seriously. I——"

"But do you realise that he is out there in the woods, possibly in a serious condition? That anything can happen to him? That he needs care and treatment instead of roughing it in melting snow in the worst month of the year?" She had turned and faced him, her lithe body tense, her hands clutching her dress at the sides. The yellow lamplight gleamed softly on the shadowy masses of her hair but was dimmed by the fire in her eyes.

"Oh, Allan, you should have kept him! Can't you realise what you've done? . . . Dick! The best friend any two people ever had! You knew he was seriously ill and yet you let him go. Think what he has done for us. When we were in trouble did he leave us alone?—did he leave us to fight it out blindly by ourselves?

"Oh, can't you see! . . . The first time he needed

you you failed him! How *could* you, Allan? How could you?"

Mackenzie was surprised and, for the moment, silenced by her torrent of words. An instant's reflection told him he had acted squarely by Bream, taken the only course possible under the circumstances. And yet how could he convince Eloise of this without exposing the real motives that underlay the whole tragic business?

He hesitated, conscious of having been forced into an untenable position, and nettled by the knowledge of the fact. Why was she so persistent? If she only realised what he had been through and was going through!

He shrugged a trifle irritably and looked at his watch, rising as he noted the time.

"Our points of view differ," he said with emphasis, "because I was there through it all and you were not. If you had seen and heard what I have you would have acted just as I did." He reached for his cap.

"But to let him go away in that condition!" she said as if weighing the problem. "I don't believe I would have done it, Allan. I can't conceive of doing it. If you could only show me——"

He opened the door abruptly.

"I've gone over all that ground before," he said with unexpected brusqueness, "and I don't believe it will help matters to go over it again. I'm going to the office. Ought to be back in an hour."

His reply, unnecessarily (she thought) impatient and intolerant, rang crudely in the girl's ears and struck her into incredulous, hurt silence. After one amazed glance at him she said no more.

And Allan, aware of that glance, went out remorse-



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ful and troubled, for he feared that doubt of him had risen in her mind. He felt that his explanations had failed to convince and that she scented intuitively that something had been withheld from her.

It was not that she suspected the truth about Bream's departure, but that she was suspicious of not having been told the truth.

CHAPTER XX

"MINE EYES HAVE SEEN MY DESIRE"

IN the office he found Barry and the foremen together with many of the lumberjacks, and he repeated to them the story of Bream's illness and sudden departure. And here, because he was dealing with a less acute type of intelligence, and because repetition had made him glib, he had little trouble in making his narrative convincing.

After a while, when the first sensation had passed and all except the usual heads had drifted out and back to the bunk-house, he got down to business. But as he talked, trying to instil cheer and confidence into the others, he became conscious, gradually, of a subtle change in his relations with them. A sense of emptiness and loss seemed to have settled down upon the camp chilling its spirit, for with Bream's going had gone the vital soul of the enterprise.

This splendid organisation that he had spent six years in perfecting appeared like a watch whose mainspring has been removed—potentially powerful but lacking the strong pressure towards action.

Oppressed by this intangible, pervading spirit, the new responsibility that he had assumed weighed heavily upon Allan. He saw clearly for the first time just how much he must supply, and his heart grew heavy in his breast.

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Then to him, too, came a sudden great sense of lack. He realised that the prop on which he had been accustomed to lean in moments of indecision was gone now, that he must himself henceforth be the court of last resort, must stand alone, the bulwark of the business. And shrinking fear of incapability assailed him—fear that he might take wrong steps and make faulty decisions.

Oh why, he asked himself in a moment of weakness, could not Bream have stuck it out through the drive?

Then shame at this infirmity of spirit goaded him and brought out a sturdy combativeness in his nature. With the clearer vision that his new life had brought him he commenced to feel that perhaps this which had come to-day had come with a purpose.

"Perhaps it is to test me," he thought. "Perhaps I have been working towards this all my life." And the eagerness to accomplish crystallised into a determination. It entered into his conversation with the men in the office and influenced his attitude regarding the work to be done.

Aware of the fact that Bream would not return to boss the drive he sought to treat matters with that idea in view and yet without arousing the suspicion of the others. Tactfully he intimated that the doctor "out there" might not permit the Chief to return under a considerable period, and based his hints on the enforced rest usually thought necessary after such a breakdown.

"If he comes back for the drive so much the better," was the way he put it, "but if he doesn't we want to be able to go ahead without him."

The conference lasted sometime beyond the hour

that he had specified to Eloise and when he returned to the cabin his mind was full of the work that lay before him. He found her in a soft, half-barbaric fur robe she used as a dressing-gown, seated beside the table an open book lying idly in her lap. In his preoccupation he failed to notice the anxious glance with which she scanned his face as he entered.

He sat down near the stove and slowly stuffed his pipe with tobacco that he shaved from a plug with his jack-knife.

"What happened, Allan?" she asked when he had fired the weed and sat back contemplatively.

"Nothing much," he replied absently, his mind busy with a prospective dam that must be built in the river twenty miles below the Y.

"Did Dick's absence seem to make any difference in the spirit of the men?"

"Some, of course. But—" his new-born resolution to conquer enthused him—"we'll overcome that, I think. We'll *have* to overcome it. The whole success of the year depends on getting the drive through, and with Dick out of things for good we must depend—" He stopped short, his blood congealing in his veins, his heart seemingly stopped. Then, realising that his conscious silence only emphasised the slip, he stumbled on:—"Everything will depend on our preparedness in anticipating river troubles. Now—er—Borwell tells me that at Devil's Elbow a dam——"

"What did—you—say, Allan? *Dick out of things for good?*" Her startled voice cut cleanly across his own laboured mumble. She sat motionless, seemingly with every faculty arrested, as if his words had turned her into stone. Her features were transfixed by an expression of fear, half-wild, half-doubting.

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For a long moment she sat thus until his confused face betrayed the truth to her dulled consciousness. She straightened up and pierced him with a flaming glance.

"What are you telling me, Allan? . . . Dick gone for good? Are you mad? . . . What do you mean?"

Mackenzie turned his chair deliberately about until he faced her. He knew that dissimulation between them was useless now and, knowing it, he experienced a feeling of immense relief. The sooner Eloise realised that Dick had passed out of their lives forever the better, he thought. And if there were to be grief and shock let them come at once and be over with; for it was the life before them not that of the past that held the prospect.

Already he longed intensely for the time when, in his new appreciation of her, he should have so filled Eloise's life with devotion that everyone else, even Bream, should have faded into merely an impersonal memory.

The sooner he broke the news, then, and soothed her into the acceptance of it, the better.

He determined not to mince matters.

"I mean just that," he said bluntly. "Dick is out of things for good. He has gone away and will never come back."

With an effort she mastered the first shock. Reason reasserted itself.

"What *are* you saying, Allan?" she cried. "You can't be serious! Dick gone and never coming back! Why, that's preposterous——"

"It's true, I tell you," he insisted. "It's true."

Yet she could not believe him, although his sincerity of tone allowed no loophole of doubt.

Suddenly memory of her feelings after Allan had left for the office recurred, and she experienced the sickening certainty of suspicion confirmed.

"I *knew* there was something all the time," she said with clear-eyed accusation. "I knew you hadn't told me the whole truth. . . . And this was it!"

"Yes. And now I am only sorry I did not tell you in the first place. . . . When I thought the thing over just after Dick went, it seemed to me better not to tell anybody at all for a while—even you. But I see now I was wrong so far as you were concerned."

She stared at him blankly, her mind whirling, confused by the overwhelming realisation that this Thing must be—that Dick, the splendid, the tender, had gone out of her life for all time.

Sights and sounds became indistinct. . . . It was as if she were walking in a fog on a poorly lighted street. She seemed to have left clear-cut realities and to be groping about blindly in a region that lacked direction and the points of the compass.

"*He will never come back!*" she told herself with wild, intuitive certainty, and then moaned aloud: "What mystery is back of all this? Why, oh why did he go? Why? Why? Why?"

Allan, startled by her tone, looked at her sharply. But he saw nothing unusual except the deathly pallor of her face and her misty eyes, for the words were but the unconscious audible reverberation of questions that had thundered across her travelling mind.

She still sat by the table but now had leaned forward in her chair as if listening, one little hand crumpling the gay bandanna that served as a table-cover.

Then, as he had always done, her husband saw and read the shell of her, that shell which years of

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practice had taught her to present to him whatever the crisis. He saw her attitude, heard her questions, and his duty appeared obvious to him. He must tell her all frankly. There must be no more deceit or subterfuge between them.

But when he came to the actual telling he found himself facing a still more difficult problem. What should he say? How should he say it? How much, in fact, of the truth *could* he tell her? He hesitated, torn between half a dozen uncertainties of duty and desire.

But she was not with him either in mind or spirit, for, deep in her breast, a strange phenomenon was taking place, a phenomenon as of ice breaking up about her heart and moving out from its frozen wilderness towards a radiant, vernal country. And she, borne along upon the full, strong flood, was watching with wondering inward eyes.

And still Mackenzie could not speak, dared not, until he found a way compatible with both honour and delicacy.

He thought first of the effect that telling the absolute truth would have upon her. Realising her happy memories of Bream's supposed friendship he could not avoid feeling that such a course could only result in pulling down that fair structure into a tragic ruin about her head. And always the thought in his mind was to spare her needless unhappiness, since he had already brought so much of it into her life.

Yet should he not tell her the truth at any cost?

He thought of Bream and how that splendid heart had kept its secret until it had been set upon the very road of death itself. Could he, Mackenzie, the one

other sharer of that knowledge, lay bare now what it had cost almost a soul's existence to maintain?

No! There was no hesitation in his mind now. He realised more clearly than ever the sacred character of the trust that had been laid upon him. . . . And, besides, there was another motive that confirmed him in this course. It touched himself subtly and regarded his own honour.

Could he be the tidings-bearer to his wife of another man's love?

His mouth hardened for a moment. Then, sitting motionless with eyes riveted upon the floor, he commenced slowly to speak, pausing frequently as he chose his words.

"Why did Dick go, you ask? I hoped I—would not—have to tell you this. . . . For a long time there has been—a—a—break between Dick and—and me. . . . It started—long ago and it has—grown steadily wider. We have concealed it—for your sake—and for the sake of—of discipline in the camp. To-day we reached—the climax—but Dick's breakdown was really what brought it on——"

Almost subconsciously she heard his voice, subdued, murmurous. But she was not cognisant of what he said. The full, strong flood in her was sweeping on now with irresistible force. Other voices whispered to her, voices compellingly sweet with the music of green things opening after a seemingly eternal winter.

The ice-bound wilderness was gone, and warm, shining fields lay about her, shimmering under the touch of a life-giving sun. Everywhere the spring warblers were singing and there was a perfume of invisible flowers. She was in a new and undiscovered country, a whispering, odorous country, long sought and long

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denied! The vision of it thrilled her and she surrendered to the thrill.

Almost without volition she rose and turned away, her face glorified, her lips parted, one hand pressed against her breast.

"Just what the break—was," he was saying, "I cannot tell you—don't ask me—it is not my—right—to tell. But believe me when I say that it was—inevitable, yes inevitable. Will you trust me that far—Eloise? And will you believe me when I say that there was no—dishonour—in it for either of us? Perhaps you will—suspect me—think that—that I—forced him to go for my—our—advantage. But I did not—I swear I did not. . . . That part of me is dead—now. We parted in—honour—thank God!"

He stopped and lifted his gaze and found her risen, turned from him. His heart sank. Had she refused his explanation? Did she doubt him after all?

He got to his feet, the prey of freezing fear, and took a step towards her.

She, tremulous in her rapt dream, yet felt instinctively his approach and turned to meet him, her face illumined.

Stricken with the strange beauty of her, a beauty that held no mirror to memory, he stretched out his hand and laid it on her arm.

"Eloise!" he cried, "what is it? Have you heard? Do you believe me?"

At the touch she shivered, and all her radiant vision was obliterated. A whirling moment and the stark realities peeped at her, ghastly, desolate, empty.

"Oh!" She shrank back from him and her voice died away to a tragic breath. "It is you! You!"

"Yes," he replied, "it is I. Who should it be?"

Why do you look at me like that?" His voice rose in a crescendo. "What has happened? What is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

He stepped closer, anxiously, and again she shrank back from him. Then, slowly, she turned away once more, her white face lifted as if striving to glimpse some dying vision.

Suddenly then, as if in despair, she sat down abruptly and buried her face in her hands.

"Leave me to myself, Allan—forgive me—don't touch me!" she muttered incoherently half-aloud and remained motionless.

Bitterly, like a homesick child, she spurned all this back to which his touch had brought her. She yearned to surrender herself again to that exquisite dream and to the shining reaches of that strange new land. And yet the vision of it receded. She saw it fading and figuratively stretched out her arms with a great soul-cry of abject pleading, a pleading that was without pride. Her dream of love had come at last, throbbing, fragrant, sweet.

And now, after such a little while, must the grim realities be faced again!

Allan, both mystified and impatient, regarded her for a moment, nonplussed, undecided.

"What's the matter, Ellie?" he asked solicitously at last. "Can't you speak to me? I've been telling as well as I could how all this happened and I swear I don't know whether you've even heard me or not. . . . If you think I forced Dick—I give you my oath I didn't! . . . Try and believe me, dear, give me the benefit of the doubt——"

His voice, steady, insistent, drilled its way into the girl's half-ecstasy so that the state of feeling, light

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and iridescent as a bubble, was shattered. There was no illusion left now. Here was life, drab, chill, crude.

Suddenly the utter hopelessness of it struck into her soul and she glimpsed in a moment of hysteria the æons of remorseless time that can exist between each tick of the clock in a life from which everything has gone—an unbearable blank vista with a madhouse at the end.

"Dearest," he was saying patiently, "if there is anything the matter please tell me. If you are ill let me get you something. . . . You are not yourself, your face is actually grey. I— See here, you are not cut up this way over Bream's going, are you?"

He paused, and when she made no reply his long-tried patience deserted him. With a bang of his fist on the table that rocked the lamp he burst out:

"Eloise, why don't you answer me? Are you deaf, or do you choose to ignore me entirely? *What* is the matter with you? I demand an answer."

The sudden shock brought her to her feet, palpitating, slender, proud, tortured, one hand pressing down the tumult in her heart.

"Oh Allan, please! . . . If you love me . . . give me time. . . just a little more time. . . . I am trying to think clearly—to answer you."

Her face was a white flame of pain, her voice a reed quivering with it. The fur robe, drawn loosely about her waist by clasping claws, fell open at the throat and showed the pulse of her neck throbbing labouredly.

"Well, *what's the matter with you?* Why should I give you more time?"

Her hand dropped listlessly to her side and her head sank forward for a moment. Then it lifted like a

reviving flower on its stem and she looked at him out of level eyes, flame-lit by her unbroken spirit.

"Listen, Allan—" Her voice was low, but thrilled with a *timbre* of afflatus, of ecstasy. "Listen and I will tell you. To-day—to-night—something has come to me, something sweeter even than—death itself—something I thought had come once and gone—but—but which had never come at all! . . . I'm going to tell you, Allan, because I must. I must tell someone." She mastered a wave of mounting emotion. "And you must know . . . the future . . . I couldn't go through it if you did not."

Still angry, he glowered at her, disturbed by an inexplicable feeling of having suddenly got out of his depth.

"To-night—I've been in another country, a far, beautiful country, and—oh, I've had to come back again!" she went on simply and tearlessly. "While I was there I thought I heard a voice I loved, a voice that is sweeter to me than any music in the world. . . . But when I listened everything dropped away and I knew that it was not his voice I heard. . . . Then I remembered that he had gone away, that you had let him go, and that I should never see him any more, and—everything seemed gone out of my mind. I couldn't think or answer you, Allan."

During a long, silence-stricken minute he looked at her with half-comprehending fear. Then a sudden chill crept down and gripped his very vitals.

"See here, what are you trying to tell me?" he cried loudly. "Are you talking about—*Dick*—for God's sake?"

To her face came a brave, shadowy smile that just rimmed the verge of tempestuous tears.

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"Yes—Dick," she said softly, and then to herself with the tenderness of utter and exquisite abandon: "Oh, *dear* Dick. . . . It was *his* voice I thought I heard out there;—he was hushing me to listen to the warblers and robins and thrushes. We had been happy there since the beginning of things and would be happy until the end of them. . . ."

Suddenly with one swift motion of her hand across her brow she swept the dream away, and a little moan of despair escaped her.

"Oh . . . Oh. . . I wish I could die. . . . This thing will kill me, Allan!" Her voice sank to a faltering, broken-hearted murmur: "I love him! I love him!"

"Stop! Stop! Do you know what you are saying?" he gasped, reaching out and shaking her by the arm.

"Yes, I know," she said raptly. "Thank God, I know! . . . But oh, that I should!"

"You—love—him!" he choked and paused. Then, as if by some chemical agency, his face aged visibly; it became the hue of old parchment and was veined with wrinkles of agony. He seemed to shrink and wither as if blasted by the heat of a furnace. He swayed on his feet, clutching the table, and his breath rasped in his throat. In one swift cataclysm the dreams that he had so fondly built crashed down into an abyss of despair across which he stared at her.

Then, after a single moment as cold and quiet as interstellar space, his hold on all that had come into his life to better it seemed to be swept away, and up through him surged a howling, gibbering anger, the primordial, atavistic, tigerish anger of the wronged male. From its stern smoothness his face became twisted and contorted out of all semblance to itself,

and a maddened, unleashed thing looked out of his flaming eyes.

Still human enough to realise the impulse that consumed him he reeled back from her, his hands claw-like, prehensile, itching to sink their nails into that tender, white throat.

Fearless, almost inviting the end, she watched him. Presently he quivered as he gave battle to the thing that would master him, quivered and shook with great, sobbing breaths. Then, as the spasm left him, his face gradually smoothed and the wild blaze died out of his eyes. But savagery was still there, ugly, unforgiving savagery, depicted in the sudden sharp outline of the salient jaw and the forward thrust of the head. No longer was he the murderous male, but he was the jealous, stricken-in-pride male, thoroughly human, because so thoroughly dominated by his multiple past.

"What is all this? What does it mean?" he demanded. "Out with it!"

Still fearless, beyond the influence of his turgid emotions, communing with the wind-blown flame of her spirit, she heard his command, and, like the virgin saints of the church, poured forth her unstained confession.

"I didn't know that it would come—this way—that it would come at all—that it would happen to me. . . . I've tried to keep myself—true to what is best. And I suppose I've failed!" A long pause. . . . "But now I see that all I have tried to do and be in the past year has been due to him, and that I've really kept my vision because he would understand."

"And I wouldn't, I suppose. Your husband wouldn't!"

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The taunt stung her and she advanced an impulsive step towards him, looking unwaveringly into his glittering eyes.

"*When* have you understood me when I needed your understanding?" she cried. "When have you wanted to have something in common with me—to understand? Lately for a while you have been kind and good, as you always ought to have been, but do you think that can make up for the awful things of the past—that it can change my heart towards you?"

"Oh no, it is too late now. There is a part of me that you have never seen, will never see, a part that lies far beneath the surface. . . .

"And we never got beneath the surface, Allan! No, not once. The husks of life were good enough for you and therefore they were good enough for me! I could eat them or starve—and I've *starved*, Allan. . . . But perhaps it was as much my fault as yours. Sometimes I have prayed God to let me die because I had failed so—because there seemed to be a lack in me of power to bring us together. But He did not. Now it is too late—too late!"

Her voice dropped from its passionate tensity to a tone of infinite regret, of compassion. Suddenly Mackenzie stirred as if to speak and, roused from her darkling mood, she begged for silence with an outstretched arm.

"Please. . . . Let me finish! I said that I must tell you and I must. . . . Oh, that we should have come to this, we who thought we loved once! . . . But it is better—better than to go on wilfully blind as we have been.

"Oh, please believe, Allan, that I am not angry, that I am not trying to hurt you. . . . But—but

to-night things have become clear to me—oh, so clear—and life has come to seem so simple and so wonderful!

"Just this afternoon Dick said that if one desired a good, true thing long enough and deeply enough, it would come—perhaps not in this life—but sometime. And oh, what I have wanted has come at last—too late."

She walked quickly to the window, her head bent, her fingers clenched into fists at her sides. Then, in a moment, with a proud fling of her head, she mastered her emotion and turned back towards him.

A change had come over Allan. In the face of that calm, unswerving loftiness of soul that, for his honour, had made a sacrifice of its deepest dreams, the primitive savagery had died in his heart, giving place to a miserable punishment. He sank slowly into a chair and leaned forward, rigid, motionless, his face buried in his hands.

"Perhaps I asked too much of life," she said gently. "I asked a great deal, love so beautiful, so perfect that it should be one with the beauty of the stars. . . . Alone in the North one comes to have strange longings and impossible ideals. .

"I had them, and when you came that summer I dreamed you were the realisation of them all.

"Oh, can't you see, Allan, can't you see what love was to me then—has always been to me? It was the greatest, noblest adventure in the world—even greater than death itself.

"And when we were married it seemed as if there were endless wonderful ideals that we could keep bright forever—little things, for I took the big ones for granted. . . . Now can you understand what

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happened to me afterwards—how I seemed to be dying inside, starving to death, in prison when I wanted to fly up and up and up? . . .

“Oh, I don’t blame you too much, Allan, for what came afterwards. You didn’t know, and I expected more of you than you could give. . . . Our marriage was just a horrible, colossal mistake for us both. I faced that long ago.

“And then, when we were lowest in the mire, *he* came!”

Her voice softened and once more the shadowy smile touched her mouth. Her uplifted face was glorious with ineffable, pure passion.

“Almost from the first day he inspired me, lifted me up! Just his voice, his laugh were wonderful to me because they rang pure and true.

“In comparison with our own wretched lives his seemed a splendid, beautiful thing! He was like some god, strong, dependable, flaming with truth and honour. . . . He came to be the only thing between me and that—that last great adventure that would have brought me peace.

“Sometimes I think he knew of the death that was spreading inside me—sensed it somehow through all my pride and resistance. He *must* have known, else he could not have brought us here, giving us another chance and making us equal with himself. . . .

“Oh Allan, he saved me when everything was gone!—showed me that life was not all a lie. He made the sunshine bright and sweet to me again. And books and trees and the songs of birds all beautiful. Yes, and he did more. He made God real!

“His very presence became the breath of life to me and I clung to him in spirit like a frightened child,

afraid every day that I would slip back again into that awful darkness he had saved me from. . . .

"I suppose I loved him from the moment in that wretched room in Hampton when he asked me to forgive him. He asked forgiveness of *me* when I would have sat by and seen him robbed of his life-work and money and good name! . . . Do you wonder I love him, Allan? . . .

"But if I loved him then I did not know it—I did not know it till to-night when you said he had gone and would never come back!"

Almost absently she paced once up and down the floor. She could control her voice now and her face had lost its look of rapt, almost mystical, contemplation. The old familiar bleak look was settling in her eyes.

"I—I have told you this Allan because you ought to know. It will make easier the life that we must live out together now. For me all this is done; it is past. I have had my perfect moment and it is gone. Something divinely beautiful has come to me, and as long as I live the memory of it will be all the answer that I need of life. I have been blessed above all women! It is enough.

"Between you and me this is past. Neither this night nor his name need ever be mentioned. I am your wife and, if you will have me, I shall try to be to you all that you want me to be. I can do no more!"

She ceased speaking and sank weakly into a chair, her face white, her eyes closed.

There was a long silence.

Finally Mackenzie raised his head from his trembling hands and straightened wearily. His face was drawn and haggard, his eyes but burnt-out cinders

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surrounded by deep circles. He was a man who, disillusioned, gazed upon the bleak barrens of utter despair. He looked at her starkly as she sat fair and flower-like in her chair.

"Eloise," he whispered hoarsely, "would God had spared me this! . . . But perhaps it is better so. . . . Oh, what you have said is true, true all of it. . . . Oh, the punishment of my life is knowing what ruin I have brought into yours! And I do know—I do. I didn't once, but since coming here I have learned."

He groaned, twisting his damp hands together.

"The past—what I was—is dead. . . . I have changed and it was the love of you that changed me. . . .

"Oh, I have loved you, Eloise, always, as well as I could love. Nothing has really mattered to me, ever, but you. And the fear that I was losing you, the fear that this one good thing in my life—your love—would go from me, changed me, made me a good man.

"That night they thought I was lost—out there in the forest . . . under the stars—it came to me, and I dreamed of being to you everything you asked of me, of bringing back to your life what I had taken out of it."

He paused for a moment and stared fixedly beyond her as though too, from his enraptured sight, a vision faded.

"And I tried," he went on at last. "I tried. Not only because I wanted you but because it was right—for itself."

Swiftly, urged by an overmastering anguish, he came to her and knelt at her feet, his head in her lap.

"Oh, my darling," he cried, "is there nothing for

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me? No love? No hope? . . . Now—do not think of me now; but later—in all the years to come—will you never love me? Never give me what I might have had?"

A look of utter compassion made tender her face as she gazed down at him and, lifting her hand, she rested it, lightly on his hair.

"Oh, Allan, Allan, it is too late!" she cried, voicing all the regret of her lifetime.

For a minute he seemed to sink forward upon her a dead, lifeless weight. Then, lifting himself, he got to his feet and somehow found the door.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ORDEAL

OUTSIDE, lacking cap, coat, or mittens, and attacked by the penetrating cold, the instinct for shelter was aroused in him. Apparently quite without volition he made for the office and entered it.

Prolonged animal snores alternating with whistling breaths advertised the exhausted but innocent slumbers of Barry. The lights were out and the fire was banked. No one else was in the room. The long practise of habit dominated Allan's actions so that, unconsciously, he lighted one of the dingy lamps over the desk. A chair placed at an inviting angle near the stove and a half-filled wood-box wrought to the end that he replenished the fire and sat down before it. He sat motionless, hunched over, his hands clasped idly and dangling between his knees, his elbows resting on his thighs.

Dully he watched the fire burn. The flames, visible through a broken square of isinglass, seemed to hold him fascinated. Nothing occupied his mind. For the first time in his life he sat without an active thought—in a brutish apathy as complete as if some portion of his brain had been removed.

A sense of crushed deadness oppressed him. He could not feel, he could not know, he could only exist

like a primitive organism, blind, unendowed with reason, lacking sensibility.

Mechanically, from time to time, he thrust more wood into the fire, and, mechanically, he drank a dish of tea and shaved his plug and filled his pipe. Stunned, dazed, habit and instinct had their way with him.

Much later, in the bleakest of the small hours, physical and nervous weariness descended upon him, and his guardian angels of the subconscious mind got him to his feet, directed the tinkering with the stove, and propelled him into Bream's bunk. There, under the warm, heavy blankets he presently sank into a fitful and exhausting sleep.

As a result of this fitfulness his eyes snapped open the minute Rolfe was heard calling the teamsters. Even so it was some moments before he recognised his comparatively unfamiliar surroundings. Then, since his sleep had in a way refreshed his nervous force, he awoke with a fresh and acute realisation to memory and understanding.

The past twenty-four hours recalled themselves to him as a succession of ghastly ruins, the future as illimitable pain and misery. His life seemed to him like a foul abscess on the fair body of the world, and a murderous impulse came to him to fight everything sweet and good and successful and wholesome. A dull, red anger commenced to smoulder in the back of his brain, not an ebullient, seething anger but a deadly, sullen animosity at everything, that found its climax in cursing God. There came an ugly gleam in his eyes, half-veiled by the drooping lids, and a certain accenting of lines in his face that lent him an implacable and sinister appearance.

He had just washed in warm water from the top of

the stove when a sharp cry echoed through the stirring camp followed by the squeal of a horse and excited shouts, indicating, he supposed, the usual morning rumpus in the stable.

A few minutes later, however, there came a trampling of feet outside the office and the door was pushed unceremoniously open. Three men entered carrying a fourth who was groaning and but half-conscious, and whose gnarled body appeared to Allan's quick glance to have been smashed and broken.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, suddenly exasperated beyond reason by the sight.

"May kicked ol' Jimmie," said one of the men. "He's all stove up. Chest caved in, I guess."

The smouldering anger in Mackenzie's mind flared for a minute.

"Damnation!" he growled. "What was the matter with the old fool? Everybody knows that horse is dangerous. We can't have him laid up on our hands now."

With rough tenderness they laid the broken body in Bream's still warm bunk and commenced to unfasten the clothing.

"Wal, I don't know what you kin do about it," said one respectfully. "Want to take a look at him? Say! he's pretty bad!"

"No. Look after him yourself. I suppose he has got to go down to Abimoming."

"Wouldn't do no good, I guess. Anyway the sledge ain't up yet."

"Well, here you, Tom," ordered Mackenzie, still infuriated, "take charge of him. The rest of you fellows get your teams out. We can't tie up the whole camp on account of this."

The men thus released looked at their boss a moment in astonishment and tiptoed out.

Mackenzie followed them, feeling an increased bitterness against fate and something akin to hatred for the injured man. His ugly temper, goaded by a persistent consciousness of having done wrong, fed upon itself and coloured his every act and word during breakfast and afterward when the work was getting under way.

Intelligence brought to him that old Jimmie would probably die did not change his attitude.

"Hope he does it before the drive starts," he muttered. "We can't be bothered lugging him down the river."

Later in the morning when his duties had slackened he sat down, dark-browed and gloomy-eyed, on a stump beside the road and let his thoughts indulge themselves to the full. His mind at once turned to the vivid remembrance of last night's ghastly revelations, particularly in reference to Eloise, and his savage bitterness increased.

Especially unendurable was the thought of her intended loyalty to him, which he conceived to be a plan of refined torture in the guise of a sop to Cerberus. He pictured her going through life, ostentatiously a martyr, keeping him constantly reminded of her uncomplaining endurance; her body his by reason of a legal ceremony called marriage, but her mind and soul another's by reason of some thrice-cursed drivelling ideals that he seemed pitifully to lack.

Fine situation! he told himself blasphemously. So moral! So full of the ideal when you came to think of it! He'd have none of that, by God! He'd have everything or nothing! He'd ship her back to her

people as soon as this drive was over and live his own life! A lot of good this trying to live like a preacher had brought him. A lot! It had wrecked his life and placed him in a position defenceless from the lowest gossip. . . .

Anyway you looked at it he had got more out of the old days and ways!

He had been cursing beneath his breath but now he stopped, his eyes half-shut, their old crafty look in them. An idea had occurred to him and, as he considered it, his teeth bared in a sneering, half-triumphant grin.

"Bream may be a damned angel but he is also a damned fool!" he thought, turning on the stump to look about him.

On every hand, farther than he could pretend to see, the virgin forest stretched away, tall, stately, its pine, hemlock, balsam, spruce and fir a feast for the eyes. A very king's domain it was, a land-grant of the seventeenth century—and the next logical lumber country. In a year's time the world would look towards it expectantly; the Abimoming would become as famous as the Oseko. And it was all controlled by the Y in which he sat, the Y that was worth a king's ransom.

The sneer on his face deepened as he followed still further his perverted reasoning. The memory of his parting with Bream recurred to him and he actually laughed. Stick to the business, eh? Deposit Bream's profits for the year in the Sawpits Bank, eh? Pay back the twenty thousand invested when he could, eh? The laugh ended in a choking snarl as the smouldering flame in his brain again flared up.

Pay back and deposit be damned! Could Bream

ever pay back the priceless thing he had stolen from Allan's life—the heart and soul of the one woman he had loved? Never. Little, then, should he trouble himself over a trifling matter of money. Things were in his hands now and he would make the most of them! He would sell out lock, stock, and barrel. This so-called conscience and honour be cursed! He had never yet found that it paid, and those upon whom he had depended most had defrauded him beyond all the dishonesty he could commit if he lived a thousand years.

Sell out he would for all he could get, and when he went away Bream's capital and profits should go with him!

He speculated regarding the amount he could clean up on the deal. Fifty thousand would never touch a half-interest now, he knew; twice that amount would be his bed-rock figure.

Two hundred thousand for the whole outfit and a clear hundred and eighty thousand for himself. A warm thrill of anticipatory revenge ran through him and his sneer became triumphant.

"And the sooner I can put it through the better," he thought. "Once I collect from Krug & Lableau on the contract and pay the men, I'll be done and I'll pull out."

He got up from his hard seat and walked slowly home along the road, gazing with comprehending satisfaction at the tall wealth that swayed and belowered on either side of him in the gusts of wind.

A mile from camp he heard a steady *tinkle-tinkle-tinkle* behind him and turned to see the Company dog-train approaching from the south with Quarles the half-breed driver trotting beside it. The sight

recalled Jimmie's plight to Mackenzie's mind and he decided to send the injured man to Abimoming at once.

"Might as well be clear of dead wood for the drive," he thought, and waited for the outfit to approach. But it was Quarles who spoke first.

"Mr. Mackenzie," he said, "what is it I hear of Mr. Bream going south? This morning I meet Albert who runs the trap-line and he say he see Mr. Bream last night. Mr. Bream like crazy man, he say, and will not stop, and point gun at Albert so that Albert cannot talk."

Allan was startled for a moment by this echo of the night before, but the feeling gave way almost immediately to one of satisfaction. He repeated to the half-breed the story he had told the men and stilled any suspicion in that quarter. Then, as they moved on briskly toward the camp, at a propitious moment he informed the other of the situation in regard to Jimmie and the possibility of an early return to Abimoming.

"I'll let you know after dinner," he said, "so be ready to start."

It was within half an hour of the meal when they arrived and Allan went at once to the office.

As he stepped inside out of the bright sunshine his eyes were blinded for a moment, and he moved towards the injured man's bunk more by familiarity with the room than by sight.

Then, when his vision cleared, he found himself almost touching his wife who was seated at Jimmie's side. Involuntarily he recoiled a little.

"I beg your pardon," he growled sullenly, "I didn't see you at first. I was blinded for the moment." And then, after a slight pause, "How is he?"

Jimmie who had been lying silent with his eyes closed, now opened them and gazed at Allan.

"I fear, Mr. Mackenzie," he whispered in his perfect English, "that I shall not last long."

"Oh don't think that!" was the superficial, deprecating reply. "I'm hoping you will be well enough to travel out on the sledge."

"Oh, that will be impossible, Allan!" cried the girl quickly. "He can't be moved. It is very serious—a lung punctured, I think, by a broken rib. It would be fatal to move him."

"Well, we can't have him tying us up here forever!" Mackenzie retorted with one of his sudden ugly flare-ups, forgetful, for the moment, that the old man was conscious. Jimmie's round, calm eyes, deep blue like the sky even in that dim light, opened upon him again without reproach, and the quavering voice proclaimed: "I shall not tie you up very long, Mr. Mackenzie, rest assured of that!"

Furious, but doubly conscious of unworthiness, Allan had the wit to make no reply. Unwilling to acknowledge defeat, he compromised by retreating to the desk where he pretended to check up the books.

He had hardly opened the ledger when the conversation—evidently interrupted by his entrance—was resumed between the other two.

"And there was another one I used to love," said the old chore "boy" in a dreamy, reminiscent voice. "It went like this:

"*'Maecenas atavis, edite regibus,
O et praesidium et dulce decus meum.
Sunt quas curriculos pulverem Olympicum—'*

"*He* knew how to make his friend pay the freight, didn't he? . . . I have often thought that Horace and I might have been good friends, especially over crystal *pocula* filled with that famous Falernian."

"Of course you would!" agreed Eloise gaily, "and between you two and the decanter——"

"Bowl, bowl, *cratera!*" groaned Jimmie in distress at the anachronism. "A crystal one, maybe, or a bit of Etruscan pottery. But—" and he paused a moment in amused dismay—"think of being forever without a pipe and 'baccy'! I wonder what they used to do to ease themselves after their peacock's tongues and humming-bird pies. . . . Well, well. Something, I suppose. But even with the Falernian and all I am glad I lived now. Things have always broken pretty well for me. . . ."

Suddenly he commenced to choke as his lungs filled, and he strangled horribly for a little, falling back weakly at last, his lips stained.

"Please don't talk, Jimmie," begged Eloise, pale and shaken. "It makes things worse."

"Worse!" he whispered with a gallant smile, "why there isn't any bad even! Old Jimmie lying in a bunk and nursed and talked to by the owner's wife! Think of it! Isn't it some more of my dumb luck? I'd like to know how many men can say as much!"

"Oh, dear Jimmie . . . brave soul!"

"Of course—" a look of wistfulness shadowed his wrinkled face—"I've always wanted to get back to the wife, and I've thought—every year—I'd make it. . . . Tried, too. But somehow—with one thing and another—I never got past the drive town, and that meant another year. . . . But, thank goodness, I could always get a job! That was where some more

of my luck came in. It isn't every man of my age than can go choring at thirty-five a month regularly, but I never missed. No, Mrs. Mackenzie, someone always hired me."

"And the wife, Jimmie," said Eloise, "wasn't she horribly disappointed?"

"Oh, the wife!" his voice grew vague and a trifle apologetic. "I don't know. Fact is, I haven't heard from her since I came out. But perhaps that was for the best. She had no idea where I was or what I was doing, so she didn't expect me to come. It saved her a lot, I'm sure. . . ."

Jimmie's annual iron resolution to ignore the allurements of the drive town and start home to Devon had become a byword in the Oseko country, and there was many a saloon man who would not sell him a drink. But always, after the paying off, there was a traitor on one side of the counter or the other and Jimmie, helpless after the first taste, like so many of his kind, would forget everything and end his debauch in Dr. Cavanaugh's snake-room under the ministrations of Marty.

Another spasm seized him, longer and more violent than the one before, and, for a minute, it seemed as if he might lose the fight then and there. Allan, unnerved, sprang from his stool at the last, but the strangling gradually subsided and he leaned trembling against the counter while Eloise soothed and revived the old man.

Jimmie moaned and cried out suddenly: "The wood-boxes. . . . They aren't filled! . . . What will the boys do?"

"Yes, they are filled," Eloise reassured him. "Don't think about it. There are plenty of people to look after them and to wait on you, too."

There was a long silence. . . .

"This year . . . I would have made it sure!" he whispered at last, his face again wistful for the fruition of his supremest desire. "I could have got by them all—every one—this time. And now . . . I'll never get the chance."

He sighed, unconscious of the tears that rolled down Eloise's cheeks and fell upon the rough grey blanket.

There was another long silence and then, suddenly, his face lighted with dimly radiant gratitude.

"After all, there's a bit of my luck in that," he said. "If I had got to Devon. . . and found the wife gone . . . and all those I knew gone . . . and everything changed . . . I couldn't have stood it! . . . no, I couldn't have stood that. . . . It's funny . . . all my life . . . how everything has happened . . . for the best!"

"Oh, it always does, Jimmie! *Everything, always, happens for the best!*"

Mackenzie, standing by the counter, suddenly felt humiliated and ashamed. The memory of his last brutal remark returned to him and filled him with sickening self-disgust. On tiptoe he slunk out of the building conscious of having violated a sanctuary.

At dinner he told Quarles that Jimmie was unable to be moved and that the sledge should wait.

Afterwards, with no duties demanding his immediate attention, restlessness assailed him and a sudden repugnance for the camp. He hated the thought and look of it and, impulsively strapping on his snowshoes, he went for a long tramp through the forest that was still deep with glittering snow.

The smouldering, red anger at the back of his brain seemed to have died now, and he found himself im-

tent to resurrect the savage ugliness of his morning mood. The katabolism he had invited by the abandonment of himself to destructive impulses was doing its work.

He looked about him at the forest, but the sight of it did not stir in him illicit greed. He endeavoured to arouse his enthusiastic anticipations of revenge, but there was no response within him, no rise. He failed to register inspiration, and what he had dreamed of as a satisfying future looked like a desolate campaign of spite and evil. By the time he had reached an abandoned trapper's hut, the goal of his tramp, the whole thing had taken on the appearance of a fiasco.

This made him angry and he heartened himself with bravado, but the sense of mental and moral prostration that had fastened upon him overwhelmed this counterfeit enthusiasm the moment he ceased to create it, until at last he faced the miserable knowledge that he was unable to convince even himself of the virtue of his course.

Then, suddenly, bitter self-loathing awoke in him and he felt horribly alone in his evil. He knew that, by his actions of the morning, he had partially turned his world—the camp—against him, and that there was not a man who did not resent the spirit and authority that he had displayed. A little more such treatment and he saw the end: he would inevitably become a pariah, an outcast, fleeing with stolen money from a world of hatred.

Then the months of whole-hearted sharing in the work and play of his fellow-men, an aroused gregarious instinct, reacted so as to lend this prospect a positive horror in his eyes. He became acutely conscious that his revenge was not worth the taking. The con-

temptation of a return to his old hunted life revolted him. Having tasted the clear waters of wholesome labour and honest ambition, a draught from the old spring was like gall. He recognised then that the great, heaven-shaking desire towards good that had welled up in him once before had really never left him, and that it had remained for old Jimmie to stir it from its lethargic sleep.

He recalled Jimmie dying there in the cabin. Of the humble of earth was he, of the unknown and unwanted, one whose enemy had borne him down from level to level, from structure to wreckage. And yet he could say on his death-bed, his great desire unfulfilled: "I've always felt that things broke pretty well for me. . . . It's funny, all my life, how everything has happened for the best!"

That was how Jimmie had met the final No to his great desire. And how had he, Allan, met it? By curses and hatred and all the ugly rancour of false standards. Truly the misshapen vessel from the Potter's hands had held the sweeter wine of life!

Allan sat on a windfallen tree beside the deserted cabin and thought of Jimmie and sought pardon for all the curses with which he had hurried the stumbling feet and overburdened the aching arms. Certain it is that there is no anguish like the anguish of irremediable regret, and Allan, abased before the memory of the humblest of his servants, knew it to the full. Could he have shed tears he would have shed them, but they only stung his eyes while they dissolved and washed clean away the hard core of bitterness and hatred in his breast.

Had Jimmie but known it his life, in that moment, had achieved a sublime *raison d'être*. . . .

Chastened, Mackenzie's thoughts next turned to those whose images never ceased to haunt his brain—Dick and Eloise. His hurt-pride revolt was subdued now, and he could think of them calmly and in a measure impersonally. And, thinking, his egotism crumbled like the bank of a flooded river, for in all their actions, in all their pain and longing, they had been true to something above their own desires, a fealty that, for all his good impulses, was still a stranger to Allan.

How much Dick must have loved her, he thought; how much more than *he*, to put aside all for the sake of that intangible thing men call "honour"! How Dick had sacrificed to and for her always! Love to him had been an endless giving. Never could he bear to refuse her anything. Asking nothing, but giving all—true to the spirit, but only human in the flesh—he had loved her and kept the faith.

This was the love of one who had neither received nor sought a response. What then should *his* love have been in whose hands had lain the power to strike the spark from a soul at once steel and fire to the true flint!

Ah, there was his greatest failure and his greatest punishment. In not striking he had laid open the opportunity for others to strike, and now the spark had leaped and lighted an altar fire as undying as it was invisible to him.

An altar fire? Yes, but a Vestal flame; for more, even, than his was her love a secret, virgin ecstasy, a sterile fervour. Because she was a woman (to whom the sound of pursuit is the intimation of love) the passion had not reached the pitch of throbbing veins and sleepless nights. For there had been no pursuit. And yet, in other ways, the force created had expressed itself.

What a marvellous side of her Bream had called out! Spirituality, humanity, dreams; veiled fire, rosy through crystal like a Grail; and as unattainable.

Each to the other—Dick to Eloise and Eloise to Dick—they seemed to have flung out antiphonal waves of inspiration and strength, unconscious of him and yet saving him.

There was the core of their conduct! Each, living in the dream and worship of the other, had yet guarded *his* honour, even through the ultimate anguish of renunciation.

He sat silent, unheeding, unconscious, as the hours passed, and the sun, westering, shot its scattered shafts among the black boles of the trees. The air was musical with the clear flute-notes of a pair of nest-hunting robins, and from somewhere near-by came the tinkle of melted snow-water that would cease when the sun went down. But he did not hear them, nor did he feel the chill of the steady west wind that sounded the diapason of the forest.

He could think only of the wretched part he had played in life—his life and theirs. He saw, with bowed humility, his utter abasement; how he alone of them all was most honoured and most unworthy. And there was born in him a deep reverent adoration of these two who had touched the heights and the depths and were still triumphant. Even as Jimmie were they, only a thousand-fold more noble since their denial had been a thousand-fold the greater.

Triumphant sacrifice! That was the patent of their nobility, their reply to the thrown gauntlet of life. And, as the glory of it burst upon him, there surged up in him, recrudescing from its temporary sleep, a new eagerness for service, for uttermost

sacrifice. Just as the passive desire for honour in his economic and social relations with mankind had made impossible his revenge, so now the active desire opened to him the possibility of achievement on the highest plane of the spirit.

And it was true desire, not a sense of duty merely. Sitting there stripped of his sham injuries, his hurt pride, and his pricked vanity, a great cry went up from his heart that he might give fully and without stint of that little that had been his life. And, accompanying that desire, completing it and making it perfect, was an ever-increasing sense of power, that sense of power he had felt first that night of his communion with the stars.

Oh, to atone, to expiate, to gain that redemption which he saw now must be gained to bring him tranquillity in life! He was seized with the fervour of the *religieux* that counts no cost if only the sacrifice may be acceptable. Oh, let him render the world again to those two who had lost the world that they might gain their own souls! Let him, like the woman with the one ewe lamb, offer his little ungrudgingly and thankfully.

The situation in their lives was simple, apparently final, and at the same time unendurable. The end of his romance with Eloise had come. Love her as he did, he could not ask her to carry on the travesty of wifehood that she had offered. Remained for her, then, to return homeward, and for him to go on alone to what was left for him.

Bream had gone blindly forth from this, his crowning achievement, throwing aside business, wealth, and future in one frenzied toss. . . . Oh, to make restitution there!

Allan looked with his mind's eye upon this complete but invisible wreckage, this tangled knot of three life-strands that had first crossed at a sand beach in the East River. How frequently, he thought, were such Gordian knots severed by the sword of divorce or abandonment. How easy it was and how despicable! And yet there had been no thought of either, here, nor ever could have been. He, unworthiest of men, stood snow-white through the unquestioning idealism of those others.

Realising the deadlocked situation, the knowledge came to him that he only could relieve it, and eagerly he sought the means, clamouring to serve these two—the one woman on earth he had ever loved and the one man of whom he thought almost with reverence.

It came to him naturally, gently, and with a feeling of benediction, this means that he sought. Since they had lost the world, let him render the world again to them; let him give them each other.

Peace suddenly fell upon him, a peace of finality as if, after long travel, he had reached the end of his journey. He closed his eyes and a sort of ecstasy of renunciation took possession of him, a rare, attenuated joy such as he had never known. It filled his being, flowing like a healing ointment through his tortured frame. In that moment it seemed as if he had been made whole in body and spirit.

The inspiration having come, details multiplied with startling rapidity and a course of action formed itself in his mind. Eager to accomplish, miserly with every second of delay, he sprang to his feet and hurried homeward.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FRUIT OF DECISION

IT was just commencing to darken when he reached the camp. A yellow light poured weakly from the kitchen windows, but the other cabins were dark and the little settlement seemed, in the failing glow, to be touched with a certain poetry. Its raw colours were softened, and it seemed to melt into harmony with its wild surroundings. In his gentle mood Allan found it beautiful despite all that it had brought into his life. And this feeling was emphasised when he saw men coming from the office with bared heads and downcast eyes. He knew then that it had been the setting for Jimmie's last and greatest bit of luck.

He paid his sorrowful respects to the dead and found, to his relief, that Eloise had left the room before the end. Now certain things had been done and the old man lay looking peaceful and content, as if some truth from the other side had sent the soul hurrying back to smooth the wistfulness from his face and furnish an answer to those who could read. Already there were candles burning, and the office had become a sort of mortuary chapel.

Not that Jimmie's passing would draw a single tear, or affect a single appetite, or defer a single rough jest. Not at all. These were merely the prescribed forms and must be complied with.

Mackenzie found that he had many things to do before he could accomplish what he had determined upon that afternoon. First he sought out Quarles who was tinkering with a sledge near the dogs' wired pen and, over a pipe with him, learned what he could of Albert, the half-breed. This French-Indian, it appeared, ran a trap-line in the vicinity of Moonstone Lake and made his headquarters in a shack no great distance therefrom.

Was this shack hard to find?

No, quite easy if one left the lake trail at the proper spot; and Quarles obliged with a map, stick-drawn upon the snow. Allan listened carefully and memorised landmarks so that when he left the half-breed the map was limned upon his mind. By this time it was dark and he proceeded on another matter equally important. This took him to the store-house and here, as he had done for Dick but twenty-four hours before—it seemed a week—he got together such provisions as a man would take upon the trail, and piled them conveniently near the door.

At this juncture the men, shouting and laughing, came in with their tools and baskets. There was a momentary lull as the passing of Jimmie became known, but presently, when the supper-bell rang, they responded to it heartily (with all respect for the dead), and left Allan free to take the next step in his carefully laid plans. This consisted in a return to the cabin, which he had not entered since the night before, and a hasty examination of his wardrobe.

Eloise, resting in her curtained bunk, worn out with the night and day she had undergone, did not rouse at his entrance, and without disturbing her he secured snow-shoes and an armful of clothing. These, with

matches extracted from the "van," he added to the provisions in the store-house.

After supper, a trayful of which he carried to his wife, he found an opportunity to talk with Dorlon.

"I am going away," he said, "for a few days on most urgent business, and I am going to leave you in charge. While I am gone what you say goes. Under the circumstances I cannot take Mrs. Mackenzie, and I shall hold you responsible for her safety and happiness while I am away."

Dorlon, to whom the receiving and obeying of orders was second nature, wondered, perhaps, what might be behind this departure following, as it did, so closely upon Bream's. But, since the reasons had not been vouchsafed, he kept his curiosity to himself and pledged his performance of the duties that Mackenzie laid upon him.

"I am going to travel by dog-sledge," continued the owner, "and I want your help in getting away to-morrow morning before the men are up. Mrs. Mackenzie will understand that I am going but the others do not need to know anything more than that I have gone.

"My duffle is at the store-house and I shall load the sledge to-night after the men have turned in. When you have called me in the morning take the dogs to the big oak on the road below the camp. You know the one I mean?"

"The one by the place we started the first cut?"

"Yes. I will drag the sledge out and we can harness up there. I don't want the whole camp aroused when I go."

"And—er—about Jimmie, Mr. Mackenzie?"

Allan thought a moment.

"Can you read, Pete?" he asked.

"Y—yes, but I make kind of a job of it."

"Well, Mrs. Mackenzie has a prayer-book that she'll loan you, I'm sure. I think you'd better bury him to-morrow. Knock off all hands for the funeral and afterwards get them to work in number four cutting."

"Yes, sir. Anything else?"

"No, I guess not. Only don't forget to call me."

"I won't."

It was half-past nine before Allan found the opportunity to draw the smaller of the two Company sledges down to the store-house and load it. As he intended travelling light the operation was brief and by ten he was back in the cabin.

He was filled with a feeling of eager, almost joyous anticipation, a feeling that, on the morrow, would begin for him a new and long-sought emancipation. The deliberate purpose that had characterised his preparations now coloured also his mental attitude towards his project, and a grateful calmness of spirit descended upon him. He went to sleep with that peace of well-being that comes after a difficult decision triumphantly made.

It seemed as if he had just got into his first nap when he heard Dorlon's thumping fist and hoarse voice. Weary as he felt from the relaxation following his former strain, he nevertheless sprang out of bed with a recurrence of the keen anticipation that had come to him the night before.

He lighted one of the lamps in the cabin and turned it low. Then, shivering, and seated on the edge of his bunk, he dressed as quickly as his shaking fingers would permit.

Once or twice he glanced towards Eloise and noted her childlike, regular breathing. She appeared to have slept undisturbed through Dorlon's summons, and this pleased him for he had counted on this habit of not waking to prevent complications in his getting away.

Dressed and ready for the trail he tiptoed softly about the living-room performing by habit his usual morning duties. He carefully stuffed the stove with wood and opened the draughts, this being calculated to insure comfort by the time Eloise wished to get up. Next, he placed one of the chairs, whose ancestors had been a barrel close to the front of the stove and draped her garments over it, an act of thoughtfulness that he never omitted. Then he made a basin of unsatisfactory, lukewarm tea and sat down pencil in hand at the table.

From its inception he had felt instinctively that to inform his wife of the plan in his mind was to defeat it; that here was something to be carried through in the uncompromising spirit and zeal of a high duty. Moreover, since the whole new structure of his mind and spirit depended upon its successful issue, he dared not, for his own sake, submit it to the risk of assault by logic or emotion.

As he meditated, there came a savage gust of wind that made the cabin logs creak in their mortises and rattled the windows. A snarling and barking, accompanied by curses and the blows of a club, told him that Dorlon was feeding the dogs. With a gulp at his tea he set himself to write, facing the task of enlightening Eloise as to his whereabouts and at the same time saving her from alarm.

"Dear Eloise—" he began, "I am leaving camp

for a few days on an unforeseen matter of great importance to the firm. Will be back inside a week at most, I hope. Dorlon is responsible for you and is the boss while I am gone. Back him up if the occasion arises. Don't worry about me. I shall see you again soon, D.V. (*Deus volens*, as Jimmie might say). By the way, will you help Dorlon with the funeral if he seems to be getting in deep water? And you might lend him your prayer-book to carry it through, if you will."

He paused, trying to create further material of an impersonal nature and stubbornly refusing to commit to paper the love and longing that went out to her at this parting. Several moments' thought produced no inspiration, and he finally ended the missive with "Yours, Allan," and left it in full view on the table.

The uproar of the dogs he observed now to be in transit, and he knew that Dorlon was making his difficult way to the rendezvous. There was no time to waste.

With swift, impulsive steps he approached Eloise's bunk and drew aside the curtain with one hand while a passionate yearning seized him to kiss her good-bye. Then a strange thought smote him so that his hand relaxed and the curtain fell before his face. She was no longer his to kiss either in love, in greeting, or in farewell. He turned away, tortured for a moment by mad jealousy. Then the remembrance of his mission returned to him and the bitterness slowly ebbed. With a final glance about he turned out the lamp and tiptoed to the door.

Outside it was sharp and he could smell the cold. It made his lungs tingle. There was a fading star-shine in the sky and a vague luminous pervasion that

could not yet be called light, but that made one feel the passing of blackness. So far no one in the camp except himself and Dorlon had stirred. But, even as he jerked at the sledge to start it out of its frozen resting-place, the alarm clock in the kitchen went off and warned him of imminent activity.

The dogs, restless with cold and eager to be off, made harnessing difficult. But eventually they were subdued and Allan took his place by the gee-pole, the hood of his capote drawn over his head.

"Thanks for your help, Dorlon," he said, "I expect to be back in a few days. Look out for things."

"I will," said the other, and without more parley Mackenzie cried to the dogs. They lunged into the traces with a chorus of eager barks.

Mackenzie had driven dogs often in his past wanderings but not within the year, and the first half-mile along the road he used in resurrecting his proficiency in the art. At this point he struck an arrow trail leading off through the forest and turned the dogs into it. Here the work was harder and progress slower, the sledge creaking and straining over the rough ground. They crossed frozen rivulets, struggled up gullies, and pitched over partially buried tree-trunks. At the end of half an hour the luminous disc of Moonstone Lake opened before them and here Allan called a halt to get his compass bearings by the fast-increasing light. Then he mushed on across the lake, plunging into the forest again at a tangent from his former course.

Another half-hour of strenuous work and he caught sight of a tumble-down shanty through the trees. A puff of smoke issuing from the stove-pipe caused him to heave a sigh of relief.

The tinkling bell attached to the neck of Chinoki, the lead-dog, brought a man dressed in woods-garb to the door who gazed stolidly at the outfit until Allan spoke to him.

"Yess," he said in response to a query, "I am Albert. You are mebbe who?"

"I am Mr. Mackenzie of the B. & M. camp. May I stop and have breakfast? I want to talk with you."

"Oh, yess. Come in. I help you wiz ze dogs."

"Thanks, I can't wait for that. They'll be all right, I think."

The animals, blown by the hard drive, were lying in the snow, steaming and panting, their red tongues flickering. Mackenzie quickly produced from the sledge food sufficient to pay for what he would eat and followed the other inside.

"Quarles tells me you saw Mr. Bream the other night," he said while the other poured him a basin of tea.

"Oh—yess. *Tiens!* He geef me ze scare. For meenute I 'fraid of *loup-garou* when I hear heem come smash t'rough ze brush. Eet was vary late when I come een from traps and I haf plenty skeens. Eet was good day that day. I was out zere in ze woods, *pas ici*, when I hear heem coming an' I wait."

Albert handed Mackenzie a tin plate on which were pieces of frizzled salt pork and boiled beans.

"Zen *pouf!* Out he come an' I sees eet ees a man an' I spik to heem. He come close lak he not hear an' I spik to heem *encore*. Zen he hear me an' jump back an' yell 'Who are you, what you want?'"

"Zen I know heem. Eet ees M'sieu Bream, for I haf seen heem an' talk wiz heem plenty time when he hunt. An' I say: 'M'sieu Bream, eet ees Albert."

What ees ze mattair?' An' he go back from me an' say 'Lemme be!' Zen I 'fraid somesing wrong an' I go to heem, yess, to help, mebbe, an' he, quick like zat! reach for ze *pistole* an' shout: 'Go 'way from me, dam' you! Don' you foller me!' An' I scairt some more an' stan' still. Zen he look at me for meenute an' turn an' go anuzzer way—sous, sous-east, I sink. An' I stan' an' don't know what to do. I sink he crazy, mebbe, an' I ought to foller heem. Zen I sink mebbe *my* skeen better zan all skeens I have in pack an' come home. I dunno, I dunno!"

Mackenzie considered this story in silence for a few minutes while he ate.

"Could you find the place where you saw Mr. Bream?" he asked abruptly.

"Ah, *oui*. Eet ees not far. Eet ees only quatter, mebbe half-mile."

Mackenzie put down his plate and basin and reached for his mittens.

"Come on and show it to me," he said, starting towards the door. "I'll make it worth your while. I am trying to find Mr. Bream and every minute counts. He was ill when you saw him—was not right in the head, you know—and I must find him right away. You're sure you know the place?"

"Oh yess, M'sieu. *Certainement. Allons!*"

Outside, Mackenzie lightened his load by the weight of a small bag of flour, the promised reward, and got the dogs in motion, following Albert's lead.

After fifteen minutes' tramping along an easily distinguishable trail he came to a halt in a little natural clearing that was surrounded by tamarack and hazel bushes, and took a quick survey about to get his bearings. The snow underfoot was crusty and the

clearing presented several sets of old tracks all preserved in a permanent glaze by the daily thaw and freeze. The half-breed walked about slowly, examining these for a little time, always careful not to cross them with fresh marks. Then he seemed to reach a decision.

"Yess, *voici!*" he cried. "So! I come zees way home, an' *pouf!* he come t'rough bushes at me zere where trail ees come. You see?"

"Yes."

"You see where he stan', turn roun,' back up?" Albert indicated a certain spot in the middle of the clearing. "Eet ees all—eh—w'at you say—tramp?"

"Yes."

"Zen eef he stan' zere he go 'way zere, *voilà!* You go roun' behin' bush an' see eef trail go zat way."

Anxiously Mackenzie did as the other directed, and even before he reached it he saw the solitary trail winding away from the little clearing into the forest.

"It's here," he cried excitedly. "It's here, Albert!" and the half-breed joined him.

"Zat ees she!" he pronounced gravely. "Now you find heem—M'sieu Bream, *hein?*"

"If he's to be found I'll find him," swore Allan grimly and mushed on the dogs. Then he remembered, and called his thanks over his shoulder.

The other made no reply but stood stolidly watching the outfit until it had twisted out of sight among the trees.

After more than an hour's fast travelling Allan came upon what remained of Bream's first camp, a cleared space in the snow surrounded by trampling in all directions and a few black embers. The sight cheered him wonderfully, for in that spot he seemed,

somehow, to make a first faint connection with the man he sought. He pushed on with the restless eagerness of a trailing hound.

The fever of the chase was strong in him, and was multiplied a hundred-fold by the fever of high purpose that sustained him. To catch Bream was the only thing that mattered now. Here was the trail and somewhere there must be an end to it. Would he overtake his man before that end?

The fear that had haunted him ever since his decision the previous afternoon clung to him still, a fear, almost panicky, that Bream would drop completely out of sight before he could be reached. His thirty-six-hour start seemed to magnify itself into an unconquerable handicap. . . .

Yet Mackenzie was not ungrateful to the Providence that had put him on the trail. Through the agency of Albert's late home-coming and weird night meeting with Dick he had obtained his only clue. How much better was this than to face the whole of the Province without a scent, as he might have done!

As he pushed on steadily, half-trotting, half-walking and occasionally snatching a ride when there was a stretch of level ground, Allan consulted his compass often in an effort to determine the objective point of Bream's flight. The instrument showed that the course was steadily south but bearing east, a direction which was taking him farther and farther away from the Abimoming, and which, if pursued, would bring him out at or near Randall, the second B. & H. mill town. The natural features of the course were what study of the map had given him to expect.

Shortly after leaving Albert the trail led across the east branch of the Abimoming and plunged into

forest that was really vast, uncut Burchard & Hill holdings. The steady up-grade work told Allan that he was conquering the Height of Land which divided the Abimoming and East River valleys, and the noon halt found him on the crest of a low hill that seemed to mark the actual divide. From this point the trail held a little more easterly and through a country that showed no sign of human occupation except the faded blazes of the original cruisers. . . .

It was mid-afternoon before he found himself again familiar enough with his task of dog-driving to allow his vigilance occasional relaxation, and his mind commenced to inquire curiously what would be the end of this gruelling adventure. But one end gave it excuse for being. Dick must come back. So great had the pressure of Allan's desire to make restitution become that any other ending to the chase was unthinkable. Upon it rested his salvation and the happiness of the other two. Yes, Dick must come back, though he were forced to submit at the point of a gun.

What should become of himself afterwards Allan did not know—did not think. He was vaguely aware that he must somehow remove himself effectually from their lives, but how he was to accomplish this he had not speculated.

Naturally, there was divorce, an odious and brutal method, and there was that infinitely preferable (from some aspects) quiet removal of himself forever from the human stage. But as yet he had given neither of these serious thought; and in this it is conceivable that there was a note of psychic counsel—as if he felt that some other way out would present itself.

Suicide or divorce in their time, perhaps, but now to

catch Bream before he had disappeared into thin air at some railroad town—to catch him and bring him back and render the world again to those who had lost it that they might gain their own souls. That was the great exigency. . . .

And Allan, maintaining the cruel, driving pace by will-power alone now, cracked his whip over the backs of the straining, panting dogs and shouted them hoarsely on.

How far he travelled, what hardships he invited and endured, how he lost the trail in the dark and spent half a day recovering and identifying it; a description of the hills, streams, and woods he traversed, and his gradual weakening under the unaccustomed physical strain, all make a splendid story. But that story has no place here. The most interesting incident of all after the interview with Albert is the one that ended the chase.

He caught Bream.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CROSSING

HE ran him down at noon of a raw, cloudy day on the bank of a little stream known to large-scale maps as Black River, a northern tributary of the Oseko full of rapids and falls and known to trappers and cruisers as evil water. Bream had stopped to make his midday tea on the left bank where there was a natural though hazardous means of crossing, for the Black River had broken up and gone out and now was rising steadily. Its channel was swollen and filled with broken ice that revolved slowly as it swept along, or piled up in windrows against fallen trees or projecting rocks.

This was not the first open stream that Allan had encountered, for, as his trail had taken him steadily south as well as eastward, he had somewhere crossed that invisible, indeterminate line below which the ice had surrendered to the Spring and above which it had not. Here the break-up was final, and haphazard stepping-stones offered the only dry means of crossing within a dozen miles. Even a raft would have been useless unless launched considerably higher up, for a hundred yards below the crossing there began a frothing, treacherous rapid that brawled for a furlong between the slippery black walls of a little gorge and spelled disaster to any rudderless craft.

The stepping-stones themselves were the remains of a century-old rockslide from the cliff above, and even in summer did not offer secure or ample footing. Now the muttering flood of the Black River freshet was within an inch or two of their jagged surfaces, and swept by with dizzying swiftness, leaving a collar of dirty foam about each one. In the very middle of the channel two of the stones had been washed away, leaving an hiatus in the uneven progression that demanded of the traveller a prodigious leap if he would continue his journey. It presented the same challenge as a strid or Striding Place in England.

Allan had been following the hot trail along the river bank for an hour before he caught sight of Bream, and the picture he saw held him spellbound for a moment. Immediately before him a grim, grey hillock was cleft abruptly and swallowed the Black River with a flash of white teeth that betrayed the head of the rapids. The dark forest, growing close to the water's edge on the shore, and low upon the brow of the cliffs, lent a sombre gloom to the almost rayless gorge that gave it the appearance of a cavern leading to Inferno.

The only colour relief was furnished by lapel-shaped, flat, yellow rock surfaces on either side of the stream and practically level with it, that tapered toward the gorge and ended there.

It was here on the left bank, within a few yards of the stepping-stones, that Dick knelt nursing his little woodsman's fire. His pack was open beside him, the shoulder-straps hanging loose, and his snow-shoes leaned against an adjacent boulder, drying. That he did not hear Allan's approach was due both to the noise of the rapids and to the fact that Allan had

finally succeeded in getting Chinoki to run without his bell—a precaution taken against premature discovery of pursuit by the quarry and subsequent escape.

Because he had seen the trail grow warmer and warmer before him during the last twelve hours, Allan was prepared for the sight of Bream, but there was no lack of fervency in his silent cry of triumph and thanks when he glimpsed the kneeling man on the yellow rock. Though gaunt and worn by the unaccustomed forced driving, every vestige of weariness seemed to leave him and he urged on the dogs eagerly.

A hundred yards away Bream heard the approach for the first time and looked quickly over his shoulder. Then, when he saw the dogs, he stood up and turned around, one hand shading his eyes from the grey-white glare as he endeavoured to identify this apparent stranger.

Allan drove to the spot where the trail turned out upon the naked, yellow rock and halted the dogs. Then, with a feeling of mingled diffidence and anxiety, he advanced towards Bream. In a moment the latter dropped his hand and gave a violent start, taking a step forward as if to verify a suspicion that had flashed into his mind. At last a look of incredulous amazement passed over his features as he identified Allan. The latter halted his advance and the two stared steadily at each other for several seconds. Dirty, unkempt, their faces covered with stubbly growths of beard, they formed a strange tableau.

At last Bream spoke: "*You, Allan!*" he cried. "Here!— Why—I can't believe it! I—why——"

Mackenzie took an impulsive step forward.

"Dick, old man, I'm glad to see you. I've found you at last!—" He broke off, halted by a look almost of displeasure on Bream's face. The latter stared for a moment and then asked:

"Have you been following me?"

There was a brief pause. "Yes. . . . Yes, I have. I had to find you before you disappeared. I *had* to follow you."

Allan, scanning the other's face eagerly, thought he detected a changed expression beneath its unkempt appearance, as if the quiet, brooding peace of Nature had commenced already its healing action. Was it that across the brow and in the eyes there was a look of new serenity, the index of a fresh grip?

"In God's name, why?" The question came quietly but with a protesting vehemence. "Why have you come? *Why?* I thought I had put all that—you and the others—out of my life."

Allan did not answer at once but when he did it was to beg the question for the moment.

"Give me a hand with the dogs," he said, "and then we'll talk it over."

Bream hesitated and then complied. Together they unharnessed the animals. Then Allan produced food and utensils from his pack and commenced to prepare his own meal. They ate and drank almost in silence. When they had finished and had lighted their pipes Bream re-opened the conversation.

"Well, Allan," he said, "why did you come?"

This time Mackenzie did not hesitate.

"I came," he answered, speaking loudly against the roar of the rapids, "to ask you to go back to the camp. . . . No! Let me finish!"—as Bream turned

to him abruptly as if to speak. "After you had gone and the first excitement had died down, I got to thinking things over and began to see that you should not have gone at all, that it was a mistake for everybody concerned. I began to feel that I had driven you out and that you ought to be back there—and after I saw that Jimmie couldn't use the sledge—by the way, Dick, Jimmie's dead."

"No! Dead? How'd it happen?"

"That May horse. The ugly one, you know. Kicked him the morning before I left and knocked him all up. He didn't last the day out."

"Poor old Jimmie! So that was what came to him, eh?"

There was a short, reminiscent pause.

"Well, when I found he couldn't be moved," Mackenzie went on, "I couldn't stand the thought of our—my—having driven you out, and I came after you. I can't stay there knowing what it was that sent you away, Dick. You've got to come back."

Bream's teeth clenched on his pipe for a moment as he thought. Then he removed it from his mouth with a swift gesture.

"I can't do it, Allan," he said. "It's out of the question. I can't and I won't go back to that camp. You ought to have known more than to come after me with any such proposition as that. Why couldn't you let me alone? I'd got away and I was just beginning to get a hold on things again. Now, here you come, stirring everything up and wanting me to go back. It isn't fair to me, Allan. I don't want even to think about it."

Mackenzie had expected opposition and he had prepared for it. Ever since that first arduous day

with the dogs his mind had laboured ceaselessly to build up an earnest and logical reasoning by which to overcome it. Now he marshalled his thoughts eagerly, anxiously.

"Look here," he said. "I'm going to admit there is a practical side to my request as well as a moral side. We need you for the drive, Dick. I am back there supposed to take charge of a thing in which I have had absolutely no experience. Of course, you can say I have Borwell and Dorlon, and when you come right down to facts I suppose it's possible that they could get the drive through. But it's a risk, as you know. Neither of them has any initiative, and if we got into a hole they would look to me. Then where the devil would I be? Don't you see?"

"And that isn't all." He cleared his throat and let the insistent brawl of the white water below have its way for a moment. "I am playing this game straight now, as you know, and my only chance to make money—yours too, for that matter—is to get our drive through. This indifference of yours to money is a wonderful thing. But, man, is it sense? I'm not capable of it. I want something to show for my year's work."

Bream's face had shown no change of expression as Allan talked, except for a knot in his brow that might have indicated either thought or impatience. This deepened now as Allan went on.

"That sounds selfish and it is, partly. But it partly isn't, and that part concerns you. Do you actually realise what you are throwing aside, Dick, by refusing to come back? Just this: Success after six years of effort and the first money that doesn't go into another man's pocket."

"Money! Success! Damnation! I don't want them!"

"Perhaps not, now, but you will sometime. I'm not asking you to do an utterly impossible thing, Dick. I'm only asking you to stick through the drive and see your own work come to completion. Then you can get your money out and go to the other end of the world if you want to."

With an incoherent, guttural growl Bream got to his feet, a very giant of a man if he had not been so thin, and stood watching the black water hurry by the edge of the yellow rock. Then he scowled, and, with the quick irritation of his recent breakdown, turned suddenly upon Mackenzie.

"Confound it, have I got to go through all this with you again, Allan?" he burst out. "I've told you that I can't go back there and I mean it. Why, the very thought of it makes me—oh, can't you understand? Do you think I was fooling with you the other night? I can't do it. You'll have to go through as best you can without me. I won't go back."

His eyes had been fixed abstractedly on the rock at his feet, but now they focused suddenly on the pack lying open before him. An impulse seized him and he strode towards it. "And what's more," he said, "I've heard enough of the whole subject. You can't change my mind and there's no use in your trying. I'm going on and I'm going now."

Mackenzie in turn sprang to his feet, voicing his protest.

"For Heaven's sake be reasonable," he cried. "Hear me out, Dick. That isn't all. There are other reasons why I want you to go back." (All this time

he was thinking: "If he only knew! If he only knew!" and calling up his reserve batteries of argument.)

"If I've got to be nasty about this, I will," he barked with a swift change to anger. "Perhaps you don't know it but you have played a rather shabby part in this affair. Here's about the situation. You came to a crisis in your life, also, incidentally, in the lives of others, and what did you do? You ran away. You shirked your obvious duty both to yourself and to these people. You were weak, afraid! Just as much a coward as the man who hides in battle. Now I haven't made much headway with you by reasoning and I've quit reasoning. But I'll tell you this, Dick, that your place is back there whether you want it or like it, or find it hard or easy. Until the drive is over your duty is in that camp, and if you are half the man I think you are you'll finish that pack you're working on and head northwest before I can harness the dogs!"

When Allan had finished Bream sat back for a moment on his heels and looked up, his face as dark with blood as if someone had struck him. Then, quite unexpectedly, a slow smile broke through what had, for the moment, appeared to be a gathering storm.

"Allan," he said quietly, "if you are trying to shame me into going back you are not succeeding. You can't shame me because my conscience is perfectly clear. I know I did the right thing in coming away and I know I am doing the right thing in staying away. Not only the right thing but the easiest thing for us all."

He rose abruptly to his feet and swung his pack up to his shoulders. Fastened to it behind were his

snow-shoes, so fixed as to be easily detachable after the crossing.

"I think we have both wasted enough time on this matter," he added. "Everything you have said, every memory you have stirred has convinced me more than ever that I should never go back to the camp. I'm sorry to disappoint you, if this does disappoint you, but it's the only answer I can give." He stepped forward and held out his hand. "Good-bye, I hope you have all the good luck in the world."

Prompted by instinct to avoid acquiescing in this act of finality, Allan shrank back. In a flash he realised, with a sense of dismay, that he had failed utterly to convince Bream—that Bream was going on despite everything he had said. It was a new thought, an earth-shaking thought, one that had never entered his consciousness. He had never dreamed that he would return to camp without Dick. Was this to be the end of his sacrifice, his expiation? "Oh, to tell him the truth, to let him know that *she* wants him!" he thought in that first wild moment of fear, only to put the impossibility from him. Should he even consider such a course he knew that Bream would defeat it—would be no party to any such sacrifice as he intended making.

He had only one card left and he played it with all the soul that was in him.

"I'll not let you go!" he cried vehemently. "Dick, for God's sake listen to me. Here's the truth of the thing. I can't carry on that bluff back there any longer. I've had to lie about you,—where you went, why you went, when you were coming back, and a thousand others—until my life is just one tissue of lies. And the men know it—everybody knows it. They

don't believe what I tell them. Dick . . . there's—there's talk started already, talk that I can't stand and you shouldn't stand. There's a situation back there that calls for your action, for the action of any man that calls himself a gentleman. You've got to come back as I said you would or— *Now* do you see?"

Is there such a thing as a sublime lie, a divine sin? Inspired still by that almost mystical fervour that had brought him to his first flaming desire to make reparation, Allan lied. The remembrance of the hopeless suffering that those two had endured for him drove him relentlessly to bring upon himself a meed of that self-same suffering—that, by his own pain and giving of himself, they might (all unknowing) find joy. . . . What in the end would be the net result of that lie? Would God, weighing the motives against the action, bring an indictment against the struggling soul that told it?

Bream, who had turned away with a shrug after Allan's refusal of his hand, halted in his tracks and half turned back. For the first time his face was changed. It wore an expression of startled anger, anger not at Mackenzie but at those who, after all his own seeking of the right, had dragged his name and hers through the mud.

"God!" he cried. "The low hounds! Talking, eh? I'll—" He choked with speechless fury for a moment. Then into his face came a look of impotent despair, the look of one who has believed himself strong and finds himself weak.

"Oh . . . oh, I can't do it!" he cried in agony. "I'm done. It's too much to ask. . . . Go back there and face it all again? God! I couldn't. I'd break—I'd go mad! . . . Talking, you say? Allan, listen to

me! If I went back they'd have some reason to talk. . . . Do you understand? I'm broken, I'd funk—I couldn't resist! I—oh, let me out of this!"

With a swift turn he leaped away and almost ran down to the water's edge. The next instant he had begun the crossing, striding carefully but sure-footedly from one to the other of the uneven stepping-stones. At his feet the black water foamed and rushed dizzily by, and the noise from the rapids in the gorge dinned in his ears. But he did not falter.

Mackenzie, taken by surprise and realising in a flash that all was lost, threw reason to the winds and whipped his revolver from its holster.

"Back! Come back or I'll shoot!" he screamed.

The sudden cry halted Bream just at the near edge of that great leap across the middle channel where the stones had been washed away, and he turned. When he saw Mackenzie covering him, scorn and defiance surged through him, and recklessness took the place of prudence.

"Confound you, shoot! Shoot and be damned!" he shouted and turned back to the jump. Measuring it hastily he gathered himself and leaped. Almost on the instant he knew that he was going to fall short, and with feline quickness tried to bend his body forward so that he could grasp the projecting rock with his hands as he fell.

But his pack hampered him. He plunged in half-sprawling with the fingers of only his right hand clutching the stone. Immediately the tug of the swift current straightened his arm and, as he rose partially from the momentary submersion, he found himself being smothered by the onrush of the water against his face. For an instant he struggled and

then his fingers slipped helplessly. The icy shock of the water had driven the breath from his lungs and now he commenced to struggle madly for air. But the weight of his pack and the pull of the current held him too deep.

Thought of anything but tasting again the blessed breath of life left him, and he relaxed his feeble hold and rose to the surface gasping and fighting at his shoulder-straps. The current instantly bore him towards the teeth of the rapids that showed white against the gloom of the gorge a hundred yards away.

All this had taken some five seconds. During the first Allan had stood stock still, the shock of Bream's fall added to his other whirling emotions. During the second he had dropped his gun to the ground and started forward; during the third he had leaped back for a pack rope and out to the stepping-stones again; during the fourth he had made his way across them recklessly, and had just made one vain cast with the rope when Bream let go his hold and was swept away.

This time there was no hesitation as to his course, for Allan was a good swimmer. His capote, which he had loosened, owing to the warmth of the fire, was off in a few swift motions, his cap followed it; his gloves were already ashore. He dreaded the weight of his boots but dared not stop to remove them. With a swiftly indrawn breath he took the plunge.

When he came gasping to the surface Bream had already drifted twenty yards and Allan, wallowing towards him through the bits of rotten ice, made out that he was struggling. Instead of swimming (he also was a good swimmer), he was thrashing about and turning over and over, catching occasional gulps of air. Then Allan remembered the pack that must

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be growing heavier and more sodden every moment, and redoubled his efforts.

He swam with all his might, aching and gasping with the bitter cold. Then his layers of woollen clothing commenced to absorb the water and clog his motions. He felt himself gradually pulled down until he could barely lift his arms to swim.

For the first few strokes he had no definite idea what to do with Bream after he had caught him except attempt to drag him ashore or work into a back eddy that would, for the moment, defeat the current. Then, when his eyes cleared, he saw ahead, and to his right, a natural breakwater made by a spur of rock extending out from the other bank immediately above the rapids. At once he realised that it offered his only course. There was a bare chance that, by a hard, cross-current drive, he could make it.

When Bream's head showed next time Allan pounced upon it like a falcon and seized his collar with one hand. Then, swimming with the other, he began the diagonal fight.

Bream struggled. Whether it was still the effort to remove his pack or the paroxysm of drowning Allan did not know. He could not care. His strength, sapped already by his long overland journey, was centred in the battle to reach the breakwater. Aside from the weight of his clothes and Bream he had to overcome natural obstacles in the form of small ice cakes, floating branches, and the thousand dirty miscellanies of freshet water.

He panted and gasped with the effort to move his numbing limbs. Sometimes he choked as a yellow-foamed wavelet slapped into his distended mouth. Then he would fight for air, forgetting to swim, and

the relentless stream would bear them swiftly on toward their doom.

It is long in the telling but it was less than half a minute before Allan knew that they would never make the breakwater—that they would miss it indeed by the narrowest of margins. On the instant another truth flashed into his mind, bringing with it an insidious temptation, a temptation that played upon his lifelong fear of physical punishment.

He realised now that if he would abandon Bream he could still save himself. His response showed more than anything else the deep-rooted change that had come into his life. The temptation entered his mind and left it immediately, a pale, harmless thing whose venom had been drawn by the unconquerable new purpose that filled every fibre of his being. . . .

Still swimming hard he saw without a qualm the point of rock that ended the breakwater sweep by him less than two yards away. Then, suddenly, as if for the first time, he became aware of the voices of the dancing, white fiends ahead. Instinctively he ceased to swim and floated, turning himself so as to enter the rapid feet first. Bream, too, he turned on his back and, doing so, saw, for a flash of time, that, in his half-drowned struggle, the other had worked the pack almost around to the front, and that the harness was twisted and entangled hopelessly. Bream himself, exhausted by effort and submersion, lay almost motionless now, conscious, and saved from drowning only by the fingers that clutched his collar.

The next instant there was a momentary acceleration of the water, a dip, a fling, and they were in the ferment. The sky disappeared in a batter of spray and the black walls of the gorge closed in. Allan

became aware of sharp blows on his face and head as hard bits of grinding ice beat upon him, and, in a moment, he commenced to suffocate. Then he lost his hold on Bream and was fighting for his life.

After that everything resolved itself into a puny struggle against overwhelming odds, carried on in a howling, tossing, white chaos. Though he still kept his senses, all knowledge of direction, time, place and sound was lost. Only a single idea persisted in his mind—that he must somehow save Bream. Once, for a moment, he imagined that he saw a dark object ahead of him in the boiling white and, spurred by his obsession, he strove with dogged courage to go after it.

His stiff fingers had just touched something when he was thrown against a rock with terrific impact, and a wave of agony surged through him. He relaxed, half-stunned, only to be aroused again by the suffocation of drowning. He struggled to the surface once more.

At this point there was a thirty-yard stretch of smooth water leading to the final rapid, and here Allan again came in contract with Bream. This time, as if in obedience to a subconscious impulse from his former willing, a spasmodic, half-unconscious reflex caused his stiff fingers to clutch the garment of the other in a vise-like grip.

Then there came a violent tossing, another impact, and a second sharp thrust of anguish. For a black space instinct only fought for his life, and he seemed to be passing gently into blankness when sharp needle-prickings stabbed his face and, as if from a far distance, sounded a sharp snapping and crackling.

The stimulus of the pain aroused him and his

senses flickered up to a faint grip on consciousness. He found that he could breathe without effort and, coughing and choking, he drank in great gulps of air.

After a time he opened his eyes to the sight of yellow, dried pine-needles close to his face and the feeling of solidity beneath his feet. Slowly it came to him that a bend in the river at the lower end of the gorge had swept him into a shallow and against a fallen tree, and that he stood now breast deep in quiet water amid a windrow of pulverised ice.

With the first return of active consciousness his mind reverted to Bream, and wonderingly he realised that he still gripped him. Looking down at his side he saw Bream, face upward and unconscious, bleeding from a cut on his forehead.

Almost incapable of motion, and racked by increasing agony, he yet realised that the other must be got ashore to the beach but four yards away, and he fixed his mind upon the effort. Inch by inch, supporting himself by the limbs of the tree, he commenced to conquer that seemingly infinite distance. Now and then he paused as a wave of unconsciousness swept over him, but when his senses returned he strove doggedly on, panting, sobbing, and crying out incoherently to the cruel sky and the hungry waters.

As the support of the water left him he fell prone upon the stones of the beach. But after a little he struggled up again and dragged his precious burden ashore, heedless of the blood that streamed hot down his own side. In a delirium of weakness he set about the last task of restoring Bream to consciousness. With a superhuman effort he got him over on his face and pulled the tongue out between the bared teeth to let the water run from the lungs. There was but



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little, and the sluggish thought came to him out of the lurid phantasm of his agony that the blow on the head as much as the drowning had rendered Bream unconscious.

Then the fire in his brain was snuffed out and a black void engulfed him.



CHAPTER XXIV

ALLAN GAINS HIS POINT

THE two figures lay there like corpses cast up by the river, one straight and prone, the other crumpled upon its side. Streams of water trickled from their clothing and formed tiny rivulets that twisted down among the stones of the beach. Other streams, thicker, darker, pushed their way more slowly and formed black puddles.

The landscape, grim and cold as iron, was cruelly callous and indifferent. Nature showed herself in that mood the fear of which is stamped upon the souls and graven upon the brows of the wilderness people. The monotonous, senseless brawl of the rapids above typified her unconcern in this matter of the life and death of two divine beings, reported to have been made in the image of God.

Presently the larger of the two men stirred faintly and gave vent to a choking groan. A few minutes later his fingers twitched convulsively and his eyelids quivered. His raucous gaspings for breath became louder and more frequent, and soon his whole body stirred as if he were turning in his sleep. His distended mouth opened and shut spasmodically like that of a fish, and his eyes rolled under his eyelids. Dick Bream was experiencing the torture of a return to consciousness, unassisted, from a semi-drowned condition.

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At last his filmed and red-rimmed eyes quivered open in a blank stare, and his face commenced to lose its livid hue as the straining lungs supplied the blood with oxygen. For several minutes he lay panting on the edge of consciousness and then, as easily as one steps across an unmarked boundary line, he slipped into the possession of his senses. A realisation of entity came to his eyes with the same effect of habitation as when a person shows himself at the blank windowpane of a deserted house.

He licked his gummy lips, swallowed hard two or three times, and lay perfectly still. He was overwhelmed by a deathly lassitude and weakness almost to the point of nausea, for now the full force of reaction from the shock of what he had undergone swept over him.

When he had conquered this somewhat he struggled painfully to a sitting posture, his garments feeling like an icy shell about his numb, almost helpless body. Then, as he stared stupidly at the slope of the rocky bank before him, a feeling of strange warmth on one of his pinched, freezing hands drew his attention, and he slowly made out that the dark drops splashing upon it were blood. A blurring of his vision next localised the injury on his forehead and, with the idea of binding it, he fumbled at his neck for the bandana that he wore beneath his mackinaw.

But his fingers encountered an unexpected resistance, a baffling complexity of twisted straps. He looked down and discovered a torn and battered object suspended from his shoulders, an object the sight of which at first struck no note of meaning in his mind. Then presently the word "pack" oozed slowly into recognition and his memory received the first stimulus.

The corollary to "pack" was "snow-shoes" and he asked himself vaguely regarding those that he had fastened to this wreck now hanging upon his chest.

In this way, gradually, step by step, he regained his associations of time, place, and fact, and reconstructed with infinite pain the memory of the ordeal through which he had passed. He recalled his carelessness at the leap of the crossing and his clinging to the rock with one hand; the forced release of his hold and the seemingly endless struggle with his pack. Then, quite vividly, the life-saving clutch that had lifted his head above water in that black moment when it seemed as if he must drown.

Whose clutch had that been?

He answered the question with another. Whose but Allan's?—since Allan was probably the only human being within fifty miles of the gorge. He vaguely recalled now Allan's reckless but vain run across the stepping-stones the moment he, Bream, had been forced to let go his hold. The deduction was obvious. Allan had jumped in after him and saved his life. If so, where was Allan now?

His thought moved him to action and he turned slowly about as he sat, searching the beach with his blood-shot eyes. Finally, a brown, motionless heap almost behind him drew his attention, and an instant later he realised that here was Allan, crumpled, bleeding, corpse-like.

Could it be that he was dead? Bream wondered with a dull shock as he caught sight of the stark, livid face with its bluish nostrils and brown lips and eyelids. Then the ingrained wilderness instinct to help stirred in him and he sought to go to Allan. At the first moment his stiff, battered body cried out protest

from a hundred bruises and hurts, and he sat back again racked with pain. But the pain had its effect. It brought him fully to his senses and forced a clear realisation of his responsibility upon him.

As by a sudden insight he saw Nature calm, inexorable, waiting for his struggle against Her to begin. His backbone stiffened and he picked up the gage that She had thrown. It was life and death now. Let the better foe win!

Again he essayed motion and got to his hands and knees grinding his teeth with agony. But now the pack that had hung against his chest dangled in front of him and impeded his movements. Cursing disconnectedly in a kind of puerile rage, he sat down again and attacked the freezing buckles and stiff straps with his fingers, having searched in vain for his knife. It was removed at last and after he had bound the cut on his forehead he started once more.

This time he was successful and crawled to Allan's side. One glance at his ghastly face and a hasty examination of his hurts told Bream that here was a case in desperate need of attention. After making sure that Allan was not suffering from submersion, he attempted to determine what other injuries he had sustained.

In this he was only partially successful. He found however that there had been great loss of blood from a jagged, open wound in the side, and he also suspected several broken bones.

Necessity cleared Bream's mind and spurred his faculties. He knew that the one great and immediate need for them both was a roaring fire, but he dared not neglect Allan for the length of time necessary to collect wood and start it.

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He did the next best thing; he crawled back to the discarded pack and overhauled it for odds and ends that he could use as bandages—a cotton flour-sack spread already with a pasty poultice, one woollen sock, and his red neck-muffler. Even as he sought these the thought came to him that perhaps he owed his wholeness of body to the protection the broken and battered knapsack had afforded in that smashing whirl through the rapids.

Now, as he busied himself, the enforced exercise, torture though it was, flexed his stiff, bruised muscles and gradually brought back to him ease and celerity of motion. Every moment found his blood moving a little faster, and presently he found that he could walk, though uncertainly.

When he had temporarily stayed Allan's loss of blood he set about the business of the fire. He found his hand-axe still in its leather thong at his hip, for the thong had been twisted by the violence of the water and his own struggles until it gripped the handle of the axe in an unbreakable tort.

Untwisting and releasing it he lopped a few twigs of dead pine from the fallen tree that had ended their course down-stream and heaped them on a bare, flat stone near Allan. Then he felt for matches. It was the critical moment. They were there in the waterproof pocket of his mackinaw, a whole box of them, neatly tied in their rubber case. A sigh of inexpressible relief escaped him, and his fingers fumbled eagerly with the box. And yet, despite their double protection, the matches were damp and he flaked off the heads of a score before one struck. Then, with all the skill at his command, he nursed the tiny blaze until it was crackling merrily and he dared

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go for more wood. In fifteen minutes he was basking gratefully before a roaring fire.

Now, while his own clothes dried upon him and his vitality flowed gradually back, he turned his attention once more to Allan. He cleansed the wounds with cold water and adjusted the bandages more securely, at the same time making a second and more careful search for injuries. This confirmed his former suspicion of broken bones, and with the limited means at his command he tried to set them without help. But he found himself faced by problems beyond his rough, surgical skill to solve, and his concern for Allan increased. When he had done what he could he sought to dry the other's clothes as quickly as possible, and to this end supported him upright so that the heat of the fire played over him.

The realisation of Allan's condition brought back to him more vividly than anything else could have done the details of the desperate adventure through which they had both passed, and drove home to his mind the knowledge that Allan had, beyond question, saved his life. The thought stirred him deeply, and looking into the wan, unconscious face against his breast, a warm emotion that was akin to tenderness welled up in him. It was less gratitude (for even now Bream had no special desire to live) than the free, generous tribute of one brave man to the great effort of another.

He remembered how they had been about to part in the heat of anger and struggle for command, and he recalled, too, all that had taken place in the past to divide them. And over against these facts he set this deed that had recked of neither—this sublime response to a challenge that had demanded of Allan the highest

abnegation of self. The splendid courage of that response filled him with a sort of reverent admiration, and spurred him to do his utmost now that the burden of action had fallen upon him.

"It's turn about now," he thought, "and I'll pull you through if it's in me, old fellow."

When the clothes of both had become reasonably dry and there was still no sign from Allan of returning consciousness, Bream's concern was further increased. He realised that hot food and drink were absolutely necessary, and became aware of his totally destitute condition.

As things were he could not even give Allan a dish of hot water, for all his own utensils had been lost in the rapids. On the other hand, Mackenzie's equipment was at the head of the gorge. Obviously there was but one thing to do: go after it.

Quickly he made his preparations. He cut a pile of boughs and laid the unconscious man upon them at a safe distance from the fire. Then he heaped the fire with wood and laid another huge pile near it. He connected the two by a slow-burning stick, so that when one had burned down the other would catch and blaze.

Then, without snow-shoes, he clambered up the bank and entered the forest, laying his course back along the brow of the cliff that formed one side of the gorge. He found now that his own weakness had to be reckoned with, and his progress was slow and laboured. But at the end of half an hour he descended the hill that marked the head of the rapid, and a few minutes later reached what had been their noonday camp.

Because the dogs had fortunately been fastened at the edge of the forest, and had been unable to rifle

Allan's pack, he found the supplies intact. In quick succession he threw things together, donned his companion's snow-shoes, and whipped the dogs into harness. Then, with the pack strapped to the sledge, he commenced the return journey, driving the dogs before him.

When he reached the beach again he found the second fire burning fiercely and the first reduced to a mass of glowing coals. Upon these he immediately set the teapot filled with water. Then he knelt beside Allan. It was plain that, though the latter breathed more regularly, he had not yet returned to consciousness, and Bream set himself to apply what restorative methods he knew.

In a few minutes the water was boiling and he threw into the teapot pinch after pinch of tea. When it had brewed and cooled a little he drank off a huge basin of the potent stuff and with difficulty forced some of it down Allan's throat with a tin spoon. It had the desired effect. He choked and coughed, and at last his eyelids fluttered feebly. Bream talked to him, calling him by name, and at the same time forced him to drink more tea. Signs of returning intelligence became more numerous, and at last his eyes looked up into Bream's.

"There you are, old chap," the latter cried heartily. "Drink some more of this stuff. It'll make a man of you yet. Fine! fine! Feel better now? You'll be all right in a bit."

Suddenly Mackenzie's face convulsed.

"Wait! Hang on! I've got the rope! Hang on! Oh, my God!" His voice was wild, and he strove desperately to sit up. Then the agony of his broken body made itself felt and he sank down again groaning.

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"Steady, steady," said Bream, unnerved in spite of himself. "That's all over now. Don't think any more about it. I'm all right. I'm here. We're both safe."

His voice seemed to calm Mackenzie and this time his eyes sought Bream's face with understanding.

"Dick!" he exclaimed faintly with a relieved smile. "Then I *did* get you."

"Get me? I guess yes. You saved my life. But now I've got *you* and I'm going to take care of you. You're pretty badly knocked up but you're good for a lot more yet or I'm much mistaken. We're going to make tracks for camp as fast as we can and then you'll be in good hands. It's as near as a settlement and it's the place for you."

The intelligence in Allan's eyes flickered and he muttered:

"Put the men to work in number four cutting." And then a minute later: "Eloise . . . Eloise. . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Bream, as he would have spoken to a sick child, "you shall see Eloise. She shall take care of you." He inserted an arm under the other's head and lifted it. "Here's some soup I've made for you. Try and drink a little of it. It is hot and will do you good."

Half-unconsciously Mackenzie obeyed, and then sank back into a stupor-like, sick sleep. By the time Bream had made the necessary preparations for the journey his cheeks were hot and bright with fever and he was muttering deliriously.

Bream looked at him critically for a moment before lifting and strapping him to the sledge.

"It always comes after broken bones," he thought.

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"Lord! If there had only been someone to help me, I could have set them here. It's rotten bad luck. But we won't be so long. I'm sure we can save him yet."

CHAPTER XXV

"ONCE YET, THIS ONE POOR TIME"

"Before Parting."

PETES ROLFE and Dorlon sat in the kitchen of the camp. The cook kept one eye balefully upon Larry, his potato-peeling assistant, and the other upon a huge range which would soon be delivered of a litter of pies. The foreman sucked at the triangle of plug in his left cheek and aimed the result with considerable success at the nearest sawdust-box.

"I never see such a damned spell of weather," he remarked. "We been held up on this drive ten days now an' it don't look like there was a break in sight."

"You must hanker fer ice-bathin' an' sleepin' in tents," returned Rolfe, contrarily. "I don't. That wanigan don't lure me none. I never set up to be no jack tar."

"But you got to do it sometime. What's the difference when it is? The way things stand now we'll be awful late with our Krug & Lableau contract. I'd like to go out to-morrer."

Rolfe removed his speculative eye from the stove and fixed both balefully upon the cookee.

"Hear that, Larry?" he observed solicitously. "'Our contract with Krug & Lableau,' he says. That's

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how folks talks when they git all puffed up with some-thin' beside good vittles. Take warnin'. Don't you ever get thinkin' you're the cook when I go 'way of an afternoon. See?"

"Yeah," said Larry.

"An' Larry," suggested Dorlon, sniffing significantly, "don't ever figger you'll be a dentist an' pull teeth if you don't know enuff to pull pies out o' the oven when they're done."

Rolfe leaped for the stove and for the next few minutes was busy with the rescue. Dorlon got to his feet and rolled to the window, after which he paced up and down meditatively.

"Mebbe I didn't sign the contract," he said, when Rolfe had subsided, "but I might as well have for all the owners care. I never see such a way to run a camp. Mebbe if I git sick or Al drowns or Larry there croaks after one o' your minch pies, they'd put you in charge, Doc."

"Nope, not me," retorted the cook blandly. "Not while you was still on earth, Pete. An' if you croaked they'd keep me busy cookin' to celebrate your wake."

Dorlon grinned in spite of himself and turned away to hide the concession. Rolfe was undeniably in form.

"Come up! come up! say somethin'!" jibed the cook after a moment. "I lose track o' the conversation while you're suckin' wind."

"Wall, y'ole woman, *have* yer last word if ye want it," snarled the boss, exasperated. "All I got to say is that this camp ain't bein' run right. What the devil do the owners want to go chasin' off at this time o' year fer? It's none o' my business but it's all

wrong. It plays be-dam with the men more every day. They're sojerin'."

"Wal," counselled Rolfe, "you knock a couple of 'em agin stout pine-trees an' you won't see so much sojerin'. It's the boss that counts every time, ain't it, Larry?"

Leering, he turned for confirmation towards his slavey's chair only to find the nest empty and the bird flown, leaving half the potatoes unpeeled. It was plain that during the excitement over the pies the hardy youth had made good his escape.

Dorlon burst into a bellow of laughter that rattled the tins on the wall as Rolfe ran cursing to the door and flung it open. The cook scanned the upper half of the camp eagerly, but, finding no sign of the truant, directed his gaze towards the lower end. As he did so the blasphemies dwindled on his lips and he stared curiously at something, evidently other than the boy, that had met his eye.

"Hey, Pete, come 'ere," he said over his shoulder. "Here's a funny one comin'. Wonder is it a hobo?"

Dorlon joined him and stared unenlightened at the strange-looking man who was now plodding up past the stable.

"No hoboos this time o' year," he said, oracularly. "Preacher, mebbe."

"Naw! Preachers don't walk all ramshackle that-a-way," argued the cook. "Might be a jack with a hang-over lookin' fer a job. Let's go down an' see. P'raps he's saw your sojers drillin' in a medder without their general."

"Or your boy pickin' flowers 'long the roadside," came the quick counter, and Rolfe looked up with an expression of pained surprise on his face. He had

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not suspected Dorlon as one who took unfair advantage.

A half-minute brought them close enough to the stranger to see him well. He was tall and broad-shouldered but gaunt, and his clothes were dirty and torn. His eyes were sunk in deep, dark sockets, and a partially healed wound showed upon his forehead. The lower part of his face was covered with a half-grown beard. He walked draggingly as if each step was an effort.

"Well," began Dorlon, and stopped abruptly to squint and look more closely. Then, "By God! If it ain't Mr. Bream!" he bellowed, and ran forward, Rolfe at his heels.

Bream, who had seen their approach, barely acknowledged their greetings.

"Hello, boys," he said in a dead voice. "Where's Mrs. Mackenzie?"

"What the—what's happened to you, Chief?" cried Dorlon, scarcely crediting his eyes. "Say, you're all in! Let me give you a hand. What've you been doin' to yerself?"

"Where's Mrs. Mackenzie?" replied Bream, raising his voice and fixing the foreman with a leaden eye into which a spark had come.

"She's in the cabin," volunteered Rolfe. "Shall I let her know you're here?"

"No, I'll go there myself."

"Say, can I do anything? Has anything happened?" persisted Rolfe.

"Yes, something has happened. I must see Mrs. Mackenzie," repeated Bream doggedly, and plodded past them towards the cabin.

Arrived there, he knocked on the door firmly, at

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the same time standing in an attitude of almost intolerable weariness, his body bowed a little, his head sunk forward. Almost immediately the door opened and she stood before him. He lifted his head slowly, removed his fur cap, and stood looking at her. No emotion swayed him except the desperate urgency of his message and the mission that had brought him.

For a moment she recoiled slightly as at the sight of a stranger. Then, beneath his dirt, his tatters, his beard, and his gaunt weariness, she recognised him, and an involuntary, shocked cry escaped her.

"*Dick! You!* B-but what has happened to you? What have you done to make your— Dick, you're not well! I don't believe that doctor—" She broke off suddenly, feeling herself tactless in her reception of him, and held out both hands with girlish frankness. "But I *am* glad to see you; it's just splendid to have you back!"

He did not smile as he took her fingers in his incredibly rough, cracked hands; only looked at her solemnly, almost pleadingly. Suddenly a swift intuition told her that something was amiss here, something she could not determine. In his look and manner were a subtle warning and foreboding.

"Get your things and come with me, please," he said, hoarsely. "There's not a moment to lose."

She paled as his words and tone added fuel to the fire of her fear, and her eyes grew wide with dread of the unknown.

"Dick, what is it? You frighten me!" she cried. "What has happened?"

"Allan," he replied. "He is dangerously ill. I left him at the half-breed Albert's cabin. I didn't dare bring him any farther. We were coming back

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together from the South. Albert is with him now." And then, as she stood transfixed, staring at him, his patience broke. "Don't stand there like that!" he commanded. "*Hurry!*"

The tone galvanised her into action and she turned back into the cabin. For a moment he heard her running about.

"Snow-shoes?"

"Yes."

The next instant she was out and had closed the door behind her. When she had shod herself and risen, they traversed the length of the camp in silence, both oblivious to Rolfe and Dorlon standing awkward and mystified by the teamsters' bunk-house.

"Now tell me. What is it?" she said, steadily, when they had turned off into the trail to Moonstone Lake, that same trail they had taken together on one other day, a day that now seemed ages past.

He did not look at her as he plodded wearily on, but there was infinite pity and gentleness in the conventional question he asked.

"Can you stand bad news? I might as well tell you as let you find out."

"Yes," she answered unflinchingly, "what is it?"

"I—I don't think Allan—" he hesitated—"will live very long."

There was a stricken silence but no diminution of her pace.

"And that is why you did not bring him—home?"

"Yes. When I reached Albert's I was afraid to come any farther. But it's the pneumonia more than the broken bones that are killing him. We could have pulled him through with those."

"Oh, Allan, Allan!" she burst out suddenly, and then bit her lips, fighting for control. After fifty yards of silent trudging she asked quietly:

"How did it happen? Was there an accident? Tell me everything, please."

Battling with the exhaustion that weighed him down he set his sluggish mind to the task. He answered heavily, almost in a monotone.

"It was a few days after I took the trail south from here; I was sick of this place, I couldn't stand it any longer. . . . One day Allan caught up with me at noon. He had been following me with the dogs and sledge. He wanted me to come back here; tried to get me to come back to help with the drive. He said he was afraid we wouldn't get our money out because he had never bossed a drive——"

"And were you coming?" interrupted the girl, into whose whirling mind had leaped a dozen distraught interpretations of Allan's action.

"No; that was the trouble. I told him I wouldn't come. We were at the big gorge on the Black River over in Oseko—at the stepping-stones. It is a dirty place, all stone and deep water and a nasty rapid below. I told him I wouldn't come back and had just started to cross when he yelled at me. I bungled the jump and went into the water, but I managed to grab a rock and hold on for a minute. Then my pack forced me to let go.

"Well, Allan jumped in after me and grabbed me. . . . He's been delirious a lot, and talking, and I know how he tried to get us ashore. But he couldn't quite make it and there was nothing to do but take the rapids. Right there he could have saved himself, but he wouldn't. Instead, he saved me from drown-

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ing, and now he's going to die. . . God! I wasn't worth it, Eloise, I wasn't!"

He paused a moment and then went on.

"My pack saved me coming through the rapids, but nothing saved him. He was terribly hurt. But in spite of that he dragged me to the beach before he collapsed. I came to first and as soon as I could I started back with him. And I haven't slept since.

"The pneumonia came on him the first night. That was something I hadn't counted on and I had nothing to fight it with. I could have turned and headed for a settlement, but he kept calling for you constantly and I promised I would get him here so he could see you. Either way he wouldn't have had a chance. Now we have done everything possible at the cabin. That's the story."

He broke off abruptly, and into her mind there came, for a moment, the thought that this man was still true to his trust; that he had never yet failed either Allan or herself in their hour of need.

Then her thought returned to her husband and found a new poignancy in the contemplation of him. The numbness of the first shock was wearing off now, and she was commencing to feel the significance of this thing that had come to her.

"Allan dying!" she cried, with sudden piercing sharpness. "Dick, I can't believe it, I can't realise it. . . . Is there no hope for him? . . . There *must* be hope."

Bream, miserable at the sight of her anguish, but helpless, could do nothing but reiterate his conviction and try to soothe her. He told her again of Allan's splendid self-sacrifice and unquestioning courage, and touched the deed with glory by his reverent sincerity,

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so that her heart was upborne by the shining splendour of it.

When they arrived at the cabin the half-breed met them at the door, bareheaded and on tiptoe.

"He ees come to, now, yess," he whispered hoarsely. "He know me, Albert."

Quietly the two entered, the other following them.

It was a humble interior. A glowing stove occupied the centre of the floor and along one side extended the rough, hard bunk upon which Mackenzie lay. In one corner were a few boxes of provisions, and in another a pile of cleaned and dried skins; near them a few steel traps in the process of mending, and upon wall-pegs mittens, cap, capote, and snow-shoes.

Eloise advanced quickly to the bunk, but Bream detained the half-breed near the door.

"Go back to the camp and get them to bring a horse and sledge," he directed in a low tone. And then, with a look towards Allan: "Do you think he will live long?"

The other shook his head.

"No, eet ees ze las' bright before ze dark," he said.

When he had gone Bream sat down upon a provision box in the corner and buried his face in his hands, overwhelmed by the cumulative exhaustion of his days and nights of sleeplessness and hardship.

Eloise, stopping beside the bunk, looked down to find Allan's eyes closed and his sterterous breathing painfully laboured. But, almost instantly, as if her calm, strong presence had forced a messa e to his clouded brain, he turned his head slowly and his eyelids opened. Then his whole face lighted.

"Dearest!" he whispered. "At last!"

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Smiling the sweet smile that he had always loved, she knelt on the rough board floor beside the bunk.

"My husband," she murmured, "my brave, brave husband."

The old look of wistfulness crept over his pinched face, and he sighed.

"I tried so hard," he said. . . . "I wanted to give something to you . . . sacrifice . . . You gave so much for me. . . . I didn't know it would be *that* way—in the river."

"Oh, Allan, it was noble, splendid!" Her voice was vibrant with tenderness. "Dick has told me all about it, and how you could have saved yourself but you would not. And how you saved him. It makes me proud, proud!"

Moved, ennobled by his wistful devotion, his humble laying at her feet of this his supreme attempt to be worthy of her, she poured out upon him all the richness of her praise and understanding. For him it seemed a breaking of the alabaster box, an outflooding of precious ointments upon his yearning soul, and, as she spoke, there overspread his face a look of serene, triumphant peace.

"Always," he breathed, "since that night—when I came—to know—I have wanted to be—just for a minute—equal to the ideal—you had of me once!"

"And you have, Allan, you have!" she cried with all the conviction of her soul, and mastered the impulse to weep that ached in her throat.

Oh, to let him know, she thought, to convince him before he died, that he had truly fulfilled her highest vision of manhood!

"Allan, dear," she cried softly, "do you think I don't know, don't appreciate what you have done? I

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am humble before it even while I am proud. . . . And what came into your life and changed it! Do you think I have not realised the splendour of that? Ah, that was an ideal! And you were true, steadfastly true to it. Dear, dear Allan! You have seen the highest things and desired them because they were the highest, and you have given your life in proof of it. Oh, what greater ideal and realisation could there be than that?"

His face was alight now with the radiance of his inward peace and a rapt ethereal joy.

"It has come—at last," he sighed, "this that I have wanted—so. . . . You believe in me! . . . Things *do* come, don't they—somehow—sometime?"

"Yes, dear, yes. We cannot know how or when, but they come—if the longing is only in us."

"I did not know—until so late!"

"Ah, but the longing came, and that is what counts. It is the sweetest knowledge that you ever brought me, Allan—that and your triumph. Everything else is swept away, forgotten: only that sweet knowledge remains and will remain."

His hand, in which hers lay, tightened faintly, and the voice that came to her was barely audible.

"Oh, my dear . . . my dearest dear . . . Eloise!"

He sighed once again, there was the feeblest of struggles, and he had ceased to breathe.

So suddenly and peacefully had he slipped away that it was a minute before Eloise realised the truth. Then the control that had borne her through so much gave way, and she bowed herself above that wretched pallet in convulsive grief.

Bream, to whom had come only the low murmur of their voices, sprang from his seat, startled by the

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violence of her outburst, and approached the bed. Almost instantly he knew what had transpired, and he stood for a long moment gazing with tear-dimmed eyes at the triumphant and still radiant face of his friend. Then, closing the eyes, he drew the grey blanket gently over it, and, lifting Eloise tenderly to her feet, led her away.

CHAPTER XXVI

A FLASH IN THE DARK

THE next thirty-six hours were mostly oblivion to Bream for, with his great task done, outraged Nature took her toll, and he lay stupefied with sleep in his former office bunk while the life of the camp moved on clumsy toes about him.

Only on the morning of the second day did he return to complete consciousness, and, when he did, he found that Allan's funeral was but a few hours distant and that to him had fallen the lot of rendering this last earthly service. So complete had been his exhaustion and oblivion that the past, whose facts swiftly returned to him, seemed unreal, untrue. For a while he could not quite accustom himself to the state of things as they were now. Then the thought of Eloise alone during all these dark hours smote him into guilty shame.

Very real, however, seemed the funeral service held later deep in the forest as Allan had requested during a lucid moment on the journey back to the camp. So vivid was it that ever after Bream could recall its details at the slightest summons: the bearded, rough men, bareheaded and in a semi-circle; Eloise, hooded closely, slender and frail-looking in their midst, with Dorlon awkwardly sympathetic at her side; the yawning, oblong grave,

thawed and dug with great labour through the frozen ground; the plain pine coffin beside it; the black trees against the inevitable snow; the blinding, greyish-white sky, and, strangely enough, the single bright-eyed squirrel clattering about a tree trunk who scolded jeeringly across the words that Bream read as he faced them all:

"Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery."

At the commitment when the frozen clods resounded heart-breakingly upon the yellow box, Eloise who had borne bravely through it all until this, moaned piteously and broke into terrible, racking, almost soundless weeping, and Bream, hurt doubly by every pang she suffered, faltered and all but ceased to read. . . .

But he finished somehow and after the last painful "Amen" there was a moment's hesitating silence. Then, catching sight of the girl's quivering, pitiful face, he stepped to her side and gently turned her away from the last obliteration, urging her nerveless limbs into motion. His heart was aflame with pity for her and his impotence to lighten her burden overwhelmed him. All the love that had ever stirred in him rose in a great, aching cry that God should let him take her pain and that she should know surcease.

He led her slowly back to the little cabin (it seemed somehow strangely different and desolate now), and stood by the door while she went in.

"Oh, don't leave me, Dick," she pleaded, suddenly smitten with a new realisation of her loneliness. "Come in and talk to me. Do something, say something! Just for a little while—just till I get used—to things."

Wretched though the very sight of her wan, tear-stained face made him, he could not refuse. Super-sensitive to her hurt, he anticipated every pang of this first hour of complete detachment from Allan. Though she had not loved him, yet the threads of their lives had been interwoven closely. In sickness and in health, in good report and ill, they had never parted, and now, the suddenly torn habits of years would protest in bitter pain. He knew that she must look expectantly toward his chair only to find it empty; listen instinctively for the sound of his step only to remember that he would never come again; be startled to cruel disappointment by the phantom of his voice, a product of her own imagination; and that she shrank from these things like a delicate child from suffering.

So, entering the cabin, he accepted her weak, utter dependence upon his strength and support. He made her comfortable in a chair with a blanket across her knees; he poked up the stove until the fire roared, and bustled busily about the making of tea.

And meanwhile he talked. As he had taken charge of her restless body so he took charge of her restless mind. He led it gently from one topic to another, kept it constantly on the move, afforded it no opportunity to settle or brood. And yet he avoided no references to past or present events. He spoke often of Allan, referring particularly to the undying splendour of his heroism, and this, unknown to him, brought comfort to Eloise. For it strengthened her conviction that whatever motive had prompted her husband's unexplained last journey, that motive had been rooted deep in honour and love.

When the tea was ready he forced her to drink it

and to eat a little food. And then, gradually, as her courage and self-possession returned, he led the conversation by imperceptible degrees to a discussion of her new life and the future.

"For the sake of your health and peace of mind," he counselled, "don't stay on here. This camp is too full of sad associations and memories. Go away somewhere and forget if you can all that has happened. Take up life again in some different place and among different people."

"But where?" she asked. "Where can I go? I can't live alone in a strange place among strange people."

He thought a moment, pacing back and forth.

"There is Hampton," he suggested. "Dr. Cavanaugh will be coming there in a few weeks. You liked him and he was fond of you. And as soon as the drive is down I will come and see you and between us perhaps we can arrange something for the future."

"No, Dick. No, I can't go there. I was happy there for a little while but——"

She broke off abruptly and Bream did not press her. He was conscious that in Hampton as here, there were memories that she could not face.

"Of course," he said quickly. "I understand."

Then to her, perplexed, alone, overwhelmed by a great sense of bereavement, there came a desperate nostalgia for her own—for flesh of her flesh and blood of her blood. With a pang of longing she thought of her tall, gaunt missionary father with his white beard and piercing eyes, and of her gentle, cultured mother, out of whose barren, denied existence had flowered only roses where the ground was fertile for thorns. She thought of bent, old, wrinkled Akapukis, her

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Cree nurse, upon whose shoulder she had wept out her childish tragedies. And she yearned for them, all of them, with a longing that was a bitter, physical pain.

"Oh, Dick," she cried, the tears leaping to her eyes, "I want to go home! I want to see my mother. . . . Oh, I want her, I need her. . . . And my father."

"Yes, yes," he said, his heart throbbing to that lonely cry. "And you shall go. Why didn't I think of that! It settles everything. Just tell me how I can help you and I will. Where are they, your mother and father?"

"Oh," she cried, suddenly conscious of the magnitude of her request, "miles away—hundreds of miles. It's folly to think of it."

"It can't be folly, Eloise, if it will bring you comfort," he returned. "Where are they?"

She looked at him half in doubt for a moment, twisting her soaked handkerchief between her cold fingers.

"Have you forgotten?" she asked miserably. "They are at Moose Factory on James Bay—missionaries there. Can't you see how impossible it is?"

She sat forward, staring into space, her firm little chin in her hands, and her elbows on her knees.

He took a turn the length of the room, his sharply bent brows being the only sign of surprised memory. Then he stopped before her and looked down into her pinched, white face.

"It is not impossible," he said gently. "We can start to-morrow. Luckily Quarles has got the dogs in shape again and we can use them. We have plenty of grub and I can find out something about the country before we go I'm sure."

"Dick!"

She sprang up her face almost eager for a moment. Then the light died out of it as she commenced to count the cost to him. "Oh, what am I thinking of!" she cried. "We'll say no more about it, Dick. I just didn't think. It was only miserable selfishness. . . . I'm sorry."

"Sorry! For what?" he asked, sensing the bitterness of her disappointment. "Look here, don't you suppose I understand your longing for them—your mother and father? I've had it—every man or woman has it at times, I suppose—that old yearning for the shelter and comfort of those who after all love us the most. I know, I know. And you have been away from them so long—and needed them so much sometimes! I'll be glad, *glad* to take you back to them!"

"Oh, you are good, Dick, so good—" she shook her head slowly—"but I couldn't allow that. Your work is here and you are needed here. You have been away so much already. No, please don't think of it again."

"But, Eloise," he argued gently, "can't you understand that I could never be happy knowing that you needed this now and that I hadn't given it to you? There is no other place for you to go, is there?"

"No," she admitted.

"Well, then, if you refuse to go with me you will have to depend upon strangers when a *brigade* goes north, and I could never let you do that."

She rose from her chair and walked restlessly about the room.

"But I *can't* take you away now. It isn't right. I could never look back upon it and not regret my selfishness."

"Yes," he returned, "but this isn't a matter of

selfishness; it is a matter of reason and common-sense. Your life has suddenly been broken and there is only one thing on earth that you need, and that will bring you happiness." He faced her squarely, his grave, gentle eyes searching hers. "And do you think for a moment that this—" his sweeping arm indicated the camp—"could ever count with me against giving you that one thing and that happiness? It would be selfish on my part to withhold it."

Her eyes filled with tears and something that was gratitude, yet warmer and deeper than gratitude, rose in her heart and shone resplendent through them. Had it not always been thus, that he responded instantly, unquestioningly, to her greatest need?

"And that isn't all," he continued. "Leaving out your own desire, I think it is your duty to go north to your people. They haven't seen you in so long. . . . They must need you."

She sighed and lowered her eyes.

"I can't argue with you to-day, Dick," she said wearily. "Your reasoning convinces me, and yet I feel I am wrong in letting you do this."

"You would be wrong in refusing me what is the greatest desire of my life—to make you happy," he replied, simply.

With a little gesture of surrender she turned from him and again walked aimlessly about the room, content to rest in his strength and decision.

"Then you will go?" he asked after a little.

"Yes."

There was a silence before he spoke next, this time gravely.

"You understand, Eloise, that we must go alone, that we will be alone together day and night

hundreds of miles, perhaps, from anywhere and anybody?"

She turned and met his questioning gaze with clear, untroubled eyes.

"Yes, I understand. But I shall not mind what people say."

"But they, up there, have you thought of them?" The question came after a moment of surprise. His warning had been aimed in another direction.

"They will understand just as I do," she said. "They always have."

"I am glad for there is no other way just now. To-morrow morning, then, after breakfast?"

"I will be ready."

He picked up his fur cap and mittens and put one hand on the door-latch.

"If I can help you in any way, feel free to call upon me," he concluded, and smiled.

The phrase, usual, conventional under the circumstance, rang like a clear bell in her brain, for it expressed for her the man himself. Had he not always given wholly, unstintingly, at her spoken or unspoken desire? The thought of the morrow, of the journey, of what inconvenience and patience it must entail upon him, swept over her and, with that swift, free feeling that he alone had ever evoked, she turned impulsively towards him.

"Oh, Dick," she cried, "what would I do, what would I be, without you? When will you ever cease giving—giving to me?"

So swift was it, so genuine, this sudden outpouring of her appreciation, that he had not moved. Now searching her eyes, probing beyond them deep down into her soul, he saw for one dazzling instant what

sent the blood singing and spinning into his brain, and caused him to reel back against the door. And, before he could gain control, his face blazed as by the light of an unseen fire, and he straightened up.

Then a sudden realisation that this thing he had seen had not been meant for his eyes, was but a concomitant of her disarmed gratitude, summoned all the grinding iron of his will. But the words on his lips were beyond recall.

"Never," he replied huskily. "Never while you need that giving."

Then, lifting the latch as by a mighty effort, he went unsteadily out, closing the door behind him.

But she, standing there as he had left her, scarcely knew he had gone, for she had seen his face in that one dizzy moment, and felt close about her the presence of something rare, lovely, divine, that was a vital emanation from his soul. . .

He, stumbling to the office, found it empty and sat down dazed upon his bunk to face the truth. The miracle had come to pass for which he had not even dared to hope. He knew it as surely and incontestably as he knew that he breathed. Too long had he dreamed of Paradise not to know when the gates swung open. And yet did she realise that he knew? Was it not that her revelation had been unconscious, unprepared, a flash of weakness upon the heels of shock and tragedy? He believed it. The truth had been wrung from her, helpless, as the climax of a tempestuous and exhausting emotional day.

Even so, how well she had kept the secret before! How splendid had been her reserve, her control! How different, he thought, from his own miserable weakness and defeat.

Weakness and defeat! Ah, was he never to be strong? Now, not ten minutes ago he had failed again, swept from his feet by the rush of his passion—*Now. now!* With Allan . . . his friend . . . the saviour of his life . . . scarcely under ground! He shuddered there, his head in his hands:

"God forgive me!" he prayed in his heart. "Let me not be a coward and a cur!"

Then his mind turned to the journey and, for all his calling upon God, his heart-strings tightened. Could he do it? . . . now in the light of what he knew, of what he felt she must know? Could he plod two hundred miles across that frozen waste alone with her and still be true in thought, word, and deed to those high things that had inspired him unfalteringly so far?

The very challenge in the thought quickened him. He sprang to his feet, his hands clenched, and paced the floor. "There's another fight in me yet," he told himself, "another fight! Just a week. Just a week, that's all. I'll take her; I must take her. Even if I wanted to back out now I wouldn't. It's my duty. But——"

For an instant came a flash of the dazzling realisation of her love. Then his jaw shut with a snap and he swore a great oath, upon what he believed to be the wreckage of his manhood, that he would fight that one other fight already brewing in his vitals.

He did not pray as you and I were taught to pray, asking for things to be delivered, *f. o. b.* Heaven, at the earliest possible convenience: instead he dedicated himself to what he knew was right at every moment when he faced two choices. And because this habit had grown with cultivation, faith and hope surged

in him now, and he felt himself stronger, better, worthier because of it.

He went to the door of the cabin and called for Quarles to whom he gave orders regarding the preparation of the dogs and loading of the sledge, both of which he would inspect later himself. Then he devoted himself to a careful study of the big Government map that hung against the front wall of the office.

That night after supper, with something of the old ring of authority in his voice, he placed his fortunes in the hands of his lieutenants, explaining the necessity that took him away and holding them responsible for the success of the drive.

Now that fate had forced upon him again the duties that he had once felt were beyond his power evermore to assume, he was surprised at his own mood; at the strength he seemed to summon from unsuspected reservoirs in mind and body. Yet this, as it were, convalescence of the spirit was, though he did not know it, the moral legacy to him of Allan's sacrifice.

The desperate adventure in the Black River gorge and the physical effort of the journey back had cured him of his soul-sickness, had obliterated his brooding upon himself by forcing upon him thought and service for another. . . .

The morning of the departure was clear but very cold and without wind. The dogs, in fairly good condition, were eager for the traces and barked and scrambled as they were harnessed to the larger of the Company sledges.

After breakfast, having inspected the load for the last time, Bream lashed it down securely with ropes. Then he broke out the runners which had been frozen

in the snow over night by swinging the gee-pole sharply right and left. Lastly he went to the cabin for Eloise.

She answered his knock dressed all in thick brown fur from her parka, which flaunted two brown fox-tails, to her moccasins where crossed the thongs of her snow-shoes. He had not seen her since the afternoon before (Rolfe had taken what food she would eat to the cabin) and he searched her face anxiously. She was pale and weary-looking as if she had not slept, and seemed, despite her furs, frail as she never had before. Her gaze rested on his for an instant almost speakingly and he lowered his eyes.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, and turned for a silent moment to look back into the cabin that was now dismantled of many of her cherished possessions.

Though most of the men were at work in the forest she said good-bye to those that remained, offering her hand with a low word of farewell. They, awkward, regretful, stood with their caps in their hands and mumbled replies.

When she had finished she approached the sledge.

"Will you ride?" asked Bream gathering up his dog whip.

"No, not at first, unless it will hinder you for me to walk."

"It will not hinder me," he said.

He cracked his whip and mushed on the dogs. They, yelping and eager, lunged against the breast-bands; the sledge groaned and squeaked as it left the ruts and then, with Bream at the gee-pole, moved with increasing speed towards the northern end of the camp, the girl trudging beside it.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE OUT-TRAIL

THE route to Moose Factory that Bream had carefully worked out on the big Government Survey map in the office comprised more than two hundred miles of travel. Its general course was due north a little west, and he aimed to cover all the distance possible on lake and river ice.

It was a bold drive into virgin and primitive country. The first third of it would be a steady up-hill climb to the Height of Land which divides the waters flowing southward into the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence from those flowing northward into James and Hudson Bays. There would be dense forests to traverse and streams and lakes innumerable until Lake Abitibi, which approximately marked the Height, was reached. Thence they would journey along its southern shore to the outlet at the southwest end and from that point follow the course of the river of the same name northward to its juncture with the Moose. Here their goal would be almost in sight.

Equipped physically with all the necessities for the long trail, and mentally with Quarles's and Albert's combined knowledge of the country to be met, Bream faced his task without fear.

Owing to the cold snap the snow underfoot was heavily crusted so that neither sledge nor snow-shoe

broke through it, and this, mercifully, made the first day's travel comparatively easy. So easy was it that in clearings or on straight away runs the dogs had constantly to be restrained from out-stripping their drivers. On down-hill work Bream had frequently to call upon Eloise for help and then, while the sledge swooped and skidded, she would guide it in the rear by a tail-rope while he wrestled with the gee-pole in front.

From the first they said almost nothing for the air at ten degrees below zero cut into their throats and lungs like a knife-blade. But this was not the only reason. Bream knew instinctively that speech would be a sacrilege now; that her mind and soul were travelling a far country of poignant memories and griefs where even love itself would be a discordant alien.

Yet his thoughts never left her, nor his eyes, except to guide the dogs. He chose the footing that would be easiest for her and accommodated the pace to her feet. Her pale, pure face, half-hidden by her parka, seemed to him at times of an unearthly, etherealised beauty, and he watched anxiously for added traces of weariness, or the blue pinch of cold. He yearned over her like a mother over some delicate, exquisite child.

The country they were traversing now was heavy virgin forest, that very forest, in fact, which the Y controlled. As the miles multiplied behind them they seemed to grow lonely, isolated, cut off from all human relationships. They seemed to be penetrating the unknown to the tinkle of Chinoki's bell, the creak of the sledge, and the rasp of their snow-shoes.

Yet a teeming but half-concealed life was vitally interested in their passing. Chattering squirrels eyed

their approach from behind the loom of trees; occasionally a snowy rabbit, almost overturned by the dogs, bounded away in great uneven leaps, his long ears laid back. Whiskey-jacks scolded and fluttered from limb to limb of the trees along the trail, and sometimes spring birds, weathering the cold, voiced a liquid note. Everywhere they were watched by the bright suspicious eyes of invisible "furtive folk," and the forest voiced its own mysterious life by inexplicable snappings and crackings and an occasional rattle of icy snow as a tree gave up its burden at a breath of wind. . . .

At ten o'clock Bream halted the dogs and waited for Eloise who had lagged behind a little.

"It is time for you to ride now," he said with gentle authority. "You are not used to this and we have days of it before us." He smoothed the moose-hide clothes-bag in the middle of the sledge.

She lifted her eyes to his with a look of patient dependence and went at once to the place he had prepared for her. Their gloved hands touched as he made her comfortable and, suddenly, he felt the warm close presence of her drawing taut something within him like a reel draws taut a cable. He did not meet her eyes again but devoted himself silently to her needs.

At noon he called another halt for the midday meal. He chose a natural clearing and, after tangling the dogs' harness in a thicket to insure their quiet, set about the simple preparations.

Moved instinctively by the ethics of the trail that prescribe equality of labour, the girl sought to share the work. But he, recognising the pit of exhausting reaction into which she had fallen after the fortitude

of the past few days, bade her rest and unobtrusively anticipated what she sought to do.

"Oh, Dick," she said tremulously, when he brought her food and tea, "I'm nothing but a burden upon you. I can't even do my share after bringing you out on this journey. Take me back." Tears of weakness rose unbidden to her eyes.

"Take you back?" he repeated gently. "Please don't say that or even think it, Eloise. How could I take you back? Don't you know I couldn't do that?"

"But I am so worthless—such a burden! It isn't right."

He spoke sharply to the dogs which were moving restlessly and whining at the sight of food.

"Please!" he said a moment later. "Give me the pleasure of serving you. I ask nothing more. . . . And do eat something. You must."

She had put aside her granite plate, the food almost untouched, but now she picked it up again. "I'll try," she said and conscientiously swallowed half of what he had given her.

When they had finished he washed the dishes and utensils in the remainder of the warm snow water and lashed the pack again. Then at one o'clock they resumed the trail, the girl walking.

The afternoon's travel did not differ from that of the morning except in the increased upward grade towards the ridge of the highlands. The going was increasingly rough and the dogs rarely exceeded a walk as they skirted thickets and strained up the frequent rises.

The girl rode much of the time and Bream, realising the effect of the hard travel upon her already great fatigue, made the night camp early.

The site he chose was sheltered by the north bank of a little stream. As always at night his first concern was for the dogs and, when he had unharnessed them, he examined the pads of their feet for cuts and bruises. Then he fed them with dried fish brought up from Abimoming during the winter, and chopped a hole in the ice where they might drink. The animals, adapted to their environment, then made their own beds, digging warm nests in the snow-drifts along the bank, and Bream was free to look after the girl's wants.

Now, as at noon, she was attempting to do her part, and he found her unloading the lighter supplies from the tent and clearing a place for the fire. As he walked towards her she was tugging impotently at the blanket rolls, apparently unconscious of his approach. His heart swelled with pity as he saw the dark circles under her eyes, and it seemed as if her feeble hands were tugging at his own heart strings.

With firm strength he lifted her from her knees.

"Please, not to-night," he begged. "I know how tired you are. I will light the fire and you shall sit here and tend it, if you will, until I can get things ready."

"Yes, Dick," she said, almost absently, as he began to unroll the blankets and robes for her to sit on. Her voice was dead, unresisting. She yielded to his direction with a sigh of surrender.

Taking his hand-axe he climbed the bank and presently returned with a temporary supply of fire-wood and the spruce boughs to make their beds. When he had lighted the fire he erected the tiny tent that was to be her shelter, and in it, upon the boughs, spread her sleeping robes. His own he laid outside near the fire with his rifle upon them.

Next he started the supper and, while the bacon frizzled and the tea-pot simmered, cut with lumber-jack's skill the supply of wood for that night and the next morning.

They began the meal in silence and she attempted heroically to eat. Then, with a desperate effort to meet the exigencies of the situation, she tried to talk. What splendid timber there was above the Y; how cold it was for this time of the year; she had never passed through this country before and it interested her; how soon would they reach Abitibbi?

Bream conscientiously discussed every subject in turn, suffering sharply at the very sight of her pathetic effort. It recalled to him vividly the first night that he had known her, that night of the journey down to Hampton, and raised a remembrance of her unique manner on that occasion—the cultivated *savoir faire* of one who entertains an unexpected guest. The similarity and yet the contrast were painful.

Then, without warning, in the midst of their grave, halting phrases, her whole aspect changed with the suddenness of an April sky. Her hard-won factitious interest in their talk exploded like a bubble; her face lost its look of white control and became the mask of a bitter, agonising regret. Her whole expression told of swiftly mounting pain—the forewarning of a mental eruption.

Bream, taken aback, watched her, frightened. Though he knew this was but one manifestation of her prostration, it unmanned him with its terrible intensity.

"Please—please!" he begged, his hands clenched in impotence. "What is it, Eloise? What is it?"

For a moment she seemed scarcely to have heard.

Then, wringing her hands, she seemed to throw all her soul into the words that burst from her:

"Oh, . . . what am I?" she cried. "Oh, if I only hadn't that memory! That memory of sending him away . . . that night! . . . I broke his heart . . . and I never saw him again . . . never until he died!"

"Yes, yes," he soothed her as he groped in vain amid these facts for some handle of memory. Then a wretched pang of jealousy for which he immediately loathed himself shot through his heart. "But you must try not to think of those things," he added gently. "Remember only how brave he was and how good to us all."

"I do—oh, I do." Her dry-eyed anguish was pitiful to see. "And I tried to tell him—at the last. . . . Do you think he understood me, Dick? . . . Oh, I tried to make it plain. If he only understood!"

"He *did* understand. I know he did!" Bream's voice rang with strong, sincere conviction. "And it made him happy. . . . His face was radiant and what you said brought that radiance to it. He was happy, happy when he died."

This satisfied her for a moment only.

"Oh, but are you *sure*? Are you *sure*?" she broke out, eager to hear again and again his comforting reiterations. And he repeated his certitude, and watched gratefully the light of pain slowly die from her face.

When she was herself again she said nothing either in apology for her outburst or in gratitude, but sat with bowed head and sad face staring into the fire.

And he glimpsed then, faintly, the depth and darkness of the Valley she was passing through, of which he knew little and could only guess vaguely. And

thereupon depression seized him that was equal parts self-hatred and hopelessness. His love was bitter ashes in his mouth and the illusion of all love and the whole riddle of existence settled upon him with a sickening weight. . . .

At last she rose from her place and stood by the fire, half turned towards the tent; instantly he was upon his feet. With a simple motion she drew off her fur gauntlet and held out her hand to him, and he, removing his own glove, took it. Then she stood for a full minute seeming to draw strength from the electric contact, while Bream ground his teeth at the throbbing of his pulses. At last she raised to him her face and glance, both profoundly sad, and, for a fleeting moment, poured molten through his eyes the unspeakable gratitude that glowed in her. Then she released her hand and walked to the tent.

"Good-night," she said as she pulled back the flap.

"Good-night," he answered, and stood until it had dropped behind her.

He lighted his pipe, washed the few dishes, and arranged things conveniently for quick handling the next morning. Then, piling wood on the fire, he sat down on his sleeping robes beside it. Ah, how broken, how crushed she was! he thought. And how hard her misery was for him! Harder than he had ever dreamed possible. He must keep a double watch on his emotions, he told himself, cultivate a force of will that would let him die rather than betray his feelings. Only to-day he had a dozen times felt the impulse to say or do something that, said or done, would have jeopardised his honour and self-respect.

To-day! And this was only the first! Looking back, it seemed to him hideously long and filled

with an unconscious but protracted struggle. And yet there were still six days to come. Could he face them? They stretched before him an interminable period of white, blinding effort, of brutal self-mastery and constant temptation. Ah, what temptation! Just the sight of her child-like dependence was almost more than he could stand; doubly so since she had always seemed so strong, so self-sufficient—mistress of her physical and mental states. What, then, of her glances, her touch, all the thousand little details of their intimate relationship?

A faint sound caught his ear and instantly he was alert, every faculty a-quiver. A moment later it was repeated and he realised that it came from the tent, that it was the sound of Eloise weeping!

He was profoundly moved. Every smothered sob became a knife-thrust in his heart, a torture which he could neither turn aside nor relieve.

What was it that made her weep? he wondered.

Was it the past, so freshly sorrowful and yet so irrevocable? Was it Allan whose memory still haunted her with pangs of regret for he knew not what?

Strong, masculine, inured to a life and a people that crush down grief and accept injury stoically and death fatalistically, he could not know the host of poignant memories that forever crowded through her mind. He could not know that, despite the vicissitudes through which she had passed, her feelings were still as sensitive and impressionable as when she had been a girl; that she wept in turn over Allan's first, brilliant, débonair charm, his spiritual longing, the change in his life, and the words with which she had sent him to his death that he might give her love.

That she did so was only natural for, under the

shock of tragedy and bereavement, they loomed disproportionately large in her foreground. She had not yet regained her equilibrium or her normal sense of values, and could only recount her myriad short comings towards Allan, forgetting all he had done to make her life bitter and unhappy. But these things Bream did not know.

The smothered sobbing went on and, to the man outside, it was almost unendurable. With clenched fists and gritted teeth he fought down an overmastering impulse to go to her, to take her in his starving arms, and comfort her. He loved her; she loved him. God! Was that not right enough?

Instinctively he knew that in the shelter of his arms she would find peace and rest, and his impotence to give them to her maddened him. He cursed it, he cursed the necessity for it, and that wretched jealousy that he hated so surged in his breast again. Torn with recurrent disgust and pain he could not sit still. He sprang to his feet and commenced pacing up and down before the fire.

And this was his best effort, he told himself with whipping scorn—a sample of his self-mastery! What had come over him that he should tremble with weakness at a time when his strength should have been fresh, his resolution strong? Tired as he was by the day's travel, he could not rest; sleep was hours from his eyes. Endlessly, he paced back and forth, his dead pipe rigid between his set teeth. . . .

Towards midnight the fire burned low and the sounds from the tent had ceased. Only then did he crawl into his sleeping robes, feet to the fire and try to rest. He lay on his back drawing long deep breaths, and, as he gazed up at the stars that glittered with

frosty fire through the clear air, a sense of the preciousness of that life which was in his keeping surged over him. Unconsciously he prayed and presently, while he hovered in soul about that little brown tent, his eyes closed and he drifted into sleep.

At three o'clock the instinct of the trail awoke him and he replenished the dying fire. It was a dismal hour, densely black, iron cold, and silent except for some cracking tree. The stars seemed veiled though they were visible, and there was a deathly feeling in the air as if the life forces of the earth itself were at their lowest ebb.

The next morning was grey again and deceived the sleepers, so that it was after sunup before Bream awoke. He rolled out of his blankets at once and commenced the preparation of breakfast, moving about noiselessly on his moccasins lest he should disturb the girl.

When nothing remained to be done he awoke her. She greeted him with gracious dignity and deliberate cheerfulness, although her heavy, encircled eyes bespoke plainly the accumulated sleeplessness and weariness that preyed upon her. He noticed hopefully this resolute attempt to master her feelings for his sake, and accepted it as it was offered, without comment. He felt, too, that she was physically stronger and that she had gained in nerve force and control. But offsetting all this was the fact that, however gallant her attempted naturalness, her face never lost its look of fixed brooding, of subjective concentration. And an unaccountable qualm of fear for he knew not what arose in Bream that would not be allayed.

Despite determined efforts she could not eat and

Dick, conscious that she had tried, did not urge her. But he laid this fact resentfully against that intense inner activity which he could see in constant ebullition but of which he knew nothing. What was it, he wondered uneasily, that could thus sap the vital forces of her body and spirit? Some titanic battle of the soul, he hazarded, hating the thing because it tortured her.

But what battle? He did not know, could not guess any more than he had been able to divine the hidden causes of her tears the night before. His helpless impotence maddened him; the continual uncertainty tautened his nerves. Fearing lest he should speak he plunged feverishly into the various activities of departure.

Early during that morning's march they made out in the near distance, from a rocky rise, the transverse, island-studded, white expanse of Lake Abitibi. The country wore a different aspect now. The wonderful pine, spruce, and hemlock of their own district had given place to timber better adapted to its environment; smaller in size, and yielding height and girth to gnarled limbs and squat strength. And the ground also had changed. Where before there had been frequent level stretches to afford good driving, here the land was rough and barren and bristled with grim outcroppings of grey rock. They had reached the summit of the Height of Land.

When they gained the southern shore of the lake they found the ice excellent for travel and commenced to make fast time. This sort of going exactly suited the dogs, and for miles they flew at a tireless lope that enabled Bream to tow behind at the end of a line while Eloise rode.

It was exhilarating travel and it stirred Bream's blood. He felt again the intoxication of youth and the goodness of being alive. A reactive mood of exuberant unrestraint seized him and he shouted to the echoing trees and rocks as he ran or dragged behind. He bellowed snatches of song, he performed antics, he addressed the grinning dogs in grotesque abuse. Altogether, in an effort to divert Eloise, he acted like a schoolboy let loose. And she responded. Once her silvery laugh broke forth at some piece of horse-play and he was rewarded.

But, even as she watched him, she half-veiled her eyes lest he should see her adoration for his captivating boyishness. She succumbed to the infection of his extravagant gaiety, and for a while was lifted out of herself, seeming to forget the dark groping of her mind. . . .

But he saw with dismay that, in the end, this only increased the fall back into the abyss, and he witnessed with his own eyes the sudden resumption of the grim struggle.

In truth her soul was in its Golgotha.

She loved Bream utterly, madly. She longed with every fibre of her being to call him, to yield, to lose herself in the great ocean of his love. And yet she could not, would not, for ever a ceaseless voice within her cried: "Wait! Can you claim this love without dishonour, without regret, without self-reproach? Think first how it has come to you!"

And she thought and bowed her head, for, in these solitary hours of retrospection, truths had been made clear which the first numbing shock of tragedy had blotted out.

How had it come to her? As the final result of her

impassioned confession to Allan! Though she could not know all that had transpired in her husband's mind, yet she realised that it was this that had sent him on his fatal journey after Bream, and that had inspired in him the dogged courage of the Black River gorge.

This love had been laid at her feet by the sacrifice and death of her own husband. Could she, then, take it? Was there not in that very circumstance the demand for refusal? Was she desiring sacrilege, inviting the punishment of the Queen in Hamlet?

What of the future, should she claim the dream of her life? Would she be untrammelled by doubt, untroubled by a cavil of conscience after the first bliss of possession?

The conflict tore her with an agony that was greater than physical pain for, unswervingly through it all, she clung to those rarified ideals that formed the foundation upon which any structure of happiness for her must rest. Rather that a barren but peaceful cloister should rise upon them than a gorgeous palace upon the quicksand of desire.

Tugging with inconceivable power against this consciousness she felt Bream's love; the more so because, being ignorant of what had occurred after he left the camp, he could not divine the forces that assailed her. Unconsciously, mutely, he plead, as one who believed that the past had been peacefully and honourably laid away.

These things she fought over and over again as the morning dragged by. But he who did not know, who was eating his heart out at the sight of her passion-torn face, could not understand—reached a point at last where he could endure no more.

They had finished the noon meal and were talking disconnectedly, at random, both conscious of the effort and of the barrier that was rising between them more plainly with every hour. Suddenly rebellion seized Bream, a mad resistance against this intangible thing, and his despair found voice.

"Eloise," he burst out, white to the lips, "*what* is this thing that is troubling you so? I have watched it breaking your heart all yesterday and all to-day and I can't stand it any longer. Tell me what it is!"

Taken aback by his vehemence she did not answer at once, but sat with lowered eyes seeking for words. Only her mittened hands expressed emotion as they sought the edge of the sledge on which she sat and gripped it convulsively.

"I cannot tell you, Dick," she said at last in a voice of pain. "Please, *please* don't ask me."

"Can't tell me!" he cried, striving for restraint. "Why can't you tell me? You *must* tell me! You sit for hours with the look of death on your face, and I can't stand it, I tell you! I can't stand it another minute." He leaped to his feet and stood before her his face working with emotion.

"I know," she said in a small, weary voice, "I know that I am selfish and a burden to you, Dick. And you are so good and patient with me! But this—oh, believe me when I say that I cannot tell you. You wouldn't understand, you couldn't."

"*Understand!* Is there anything about you that I don't understand? Has there ever been? *Can there ever be?*" His voice was trembling, vibrant.

Stirred to the depths by his passion, she rose and faced him, meeting his pleading eyes with noble gentleness.

"Oh, don't you know that I *want* to tell you!" she said, her tone deep and sweet. "I want to tell you everything. But I can't tell you this. It is something that I couldn't tell even to my mother. It concerns a question that I must decide for myself, and not even you, were you a thousand times you, could help me."

Afraid to trust himself for the moment he turned abruptly and walked back and forth until he could again command his voice. Baffled, denied, he was frantic with impotence and jealousy. Did the tragedy of Allan's death still claim her? he wondered. Was his own love, his vital, living love, nothing to her?

"Eloise," he cried poignantly, "forgive me—but the past is dead and all the thought or regret in the world can't make it live again. Tell me, share this thing with me, whatever it is. God knows I would sooner bear it all than see you suffering as you do."

"Oh, if it were only the past!" she cried out. "That I could tell you, but this, this is of the present and future and only I can decide, only I. Oh Dick," her eyes filled with tears of weariness and self-pity, "be patient with me just a little longer. Be good to me, for I am in the dark and I don't know where to go. Here I have only you, and all my life is in your hands. Think of those things, Dick, and give me a little more time. I will tell you when I can."

"When you can! But now, *now* is the time—when you need help so much! Oh, trust me, Eloise! Pour out your heart to me. I am starving for it! It—it may save us both!"

"Dear Dick!" Her voice choked. "Always the

same—offering yourself in my dark hours. . . . Oh if it were in human possibility I *would* tell you—you deserve it—but, God help me, I can't. I *can't*, Dick. Don't ask me again!"

Her tears, her great longing for him that sounded so clear and yet without words, sent the misery of his thwarted love mounting to his head like fumes of wine. A frenzy of rebellion swept over him. He would end it all—the time was past for reason now—their suffering was too great—by it they had expiated already a dozen lifetimes of scruple and remorse! The merging of their loves into one great stream would float any wretchedness that either might know!

He took a step forward, his drawn face a white flame.

Then his vow, the thought of his unstained manhood smote him and he stopped. Her eyes, grave, large, unafraid, were on him but he did not see them. . . .

Suddenly, weak and shaking, he turned from her and fled to where the dogs lay beside a thicket, watching with pointed ears erect and rolling eyes. "Action! Action!" his reason cried, at its last gasp. Without a word he untangled the animals and drove them out to be hooked to the sledge.

He moved like a wire-control led automaton, blind, deaf, oblivious of everything but the desperate need of escaping his temptation. His breath came in whistling gasps between his teeth, and in his mind a jumble of meaningless phrases clashed and whirled: "Go, now! . . . go! go! . . . I'm done, I'm broken. . . . I'll never get through it again! . . . Another time like this and I'll—" Then aloud to her wildly over his shoulder as he fastened the traces: "Ready

there? Are you ready? . . . Up quick, then! We're going!"

And last of all to the dogs as the long, black whip cracked:

"Hi there! Mush on, you! Mush on!"



CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ANSWER

THAT night they camped at the outlet of the Lake which is the head of Abitibi River. They had travelled the whole afternoon practically in silence, both sensible of an atmosphere that crackled with danger at the first word from either. But, though they spoke little, their minds were busy. She thought: "My beloved! He has done his best but he has reached the end. Oh, what if he should camp me to-night and go back and send some of the other men to finish the journey! Yet—perhaps he ought for both our sakes."

The hateful question that recurred time and again to him was: "How can I love her as I do and yet fail so to serve her honourably?" And his only answer was a grim resolution of battle, a clarion call for his moral conscripts to take the field in one last stand. He felt his Gettysburg approaching. . . .

Sitting sleepless, pipe in hand, by the camp-fire after she had gone to bed, he mulled things over. It was quiet to-night. No sound of smothered weeping tortured him. Instead he sometimes imagined he could hear the soft sound of her peaceful, regular breathing. At such times he was happy and thankful, and would look at the little brown tent with tender, worshipping eyes.

Dear as the thought of kisses was that tent to him now. It had become the symbolical curtain to an exquisite arcanum, the veil to a Holy of Holies, every thought of which brought him figuratively to his knees. In it was all good, all beauty, all perfection. Outside and beyond it there was nothing. . . .

Reviewing more calmly now the narrowly averted crisis at noon, he could not discern wherein it had brought about any difference in Eloise. Certainly, to judge by her unchanged attitude, it had not exorcised the dark spirits that preyed upon her.

He sighed wearily, almost hopelessly. How long would it last, this state? And what was it? Of what stuff? Sprung from what cause?

The baffling, intangible nature of the thing was a challenge even while it was infuriating. What could there be in her life that he might not know? What question concerning which his counsel would be valueless?

He loosened his fur tunic, for the weather had suddenly turned warmer, and sucked abstractedly at his squeaking pipe as he pondered. Then a fact to which his emotions had blinded him all day became clear; namely, that a change had taken place in the substance of her thoughts since the start of the journey. Last night it had been the past; Allan and the fact that she had sent him away broken-hearted. To-day at noon it had not been the past but the present and future, as her own words proved.

Considering these things it seemed as if her reasoning had progressed from one logical step to another of the same problem. He tried to follow her reasoning in the light of what he knew of past events. . . .

She had sent Allan away and broken his heart;

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immediately afterwards Allan had trailed him into the Oseko country; Allan had begged him there with every argument he could muster to return to the camp.

Why?

Bream reviewed his partner's character and their relations.

A great change had come over Allan during the winter; he had been reborn morally and spiritually; both before that change and after it his one saving quality had been his great and sincere love for Eloise; he had been told frankly of Bream's consuming passion for his wife.

Was there any connection between all these facts?

Bream mused with an involuntary quickening of the pulses. Something told him that he would soon strike a trail. . . .

His thought returned carefully to her words of the night before. She had sent Allan away broken-hearted. He picked up the scent here. Only one thing he knew could have broken Allan's heart,—the rejection of his love—the knowledge that his transformation had been in vain so far as concerned Eloise. Even so, why should Allan have immediately set out after him?

A swift, daring surmise, that became almost at once a thrilling certainty, shot through Bream. Like clicking lock tumblers that fall into place the steps of his reasoning arranged themselves into the correct combination, and the iron door that had baffled him so long swung open.

Eloise had broken Allan's heart indeed for, undoubtedly, Bream reasoned, she had told him of the new love that had come into her life. And Allan,

knowing then that they two loved each other had, in supreme proof of his regeneration, sought to bring him back that they might have their happiness.

Bream sat very still, his head bowed in reverence as the wonder and splendour of this man's sacrifice dawned upon him; and when he measured the distance toward mastery the other had progressed in comparison with his own accomplishment, he felt very humble and unworthy. . . .

Then, presently, he apprehended the struggle that was torturing Eloise, and a feeling of blank helplessness came over him. In truth she could not have told him of it, nor could he have said one word to hasten or make easy her decision. With her alone, with her inmost feelings, it rested, and he felt, in sudden poignant realisation, that upon it hung life and death and the very existence of the universe for him.

He was aware that, to many souls, it might have come easily, this decision, come borne upon the swift feet of a lifelong desire. But with her he sensed that there would be a difference; that it would inevitably come as the decretal of those highest beliefs which were so instinctive and exquisite a part of her, and which had, from the first, ensnared his imagination and fired his love. Then suddenly, with a sharp qualm, he feared these beliefs, for he knew that she was capable of crucifying both herself and him at their behest.

What the final word would be he did not know, she did not know, but the undeniable conviction was borne in upon him that it would be irrevocable, unshakable.

And terror crept into his heart to lie with the helplessness already there, such terror as he had never known. For his instinct told him that despite their

situation, his power and her dependence, should she make the Great Refusal he would be as powerless to change it as to call back the hours that were flowing into the darkness of Eternity. . . .

No man awaiting the gallows ever sat through a more bitter night of anguish than did Bream beside the dying fire. It was not until three in the morning that he could calm himself sufficiently to roll into his blankets, and it was an hour later before his eyes closed in a phantasma-haunted sleep.

When he arose at dawn, pale and exhausted, the warmth in the air that he had noted the night before was oppressive. In fact the weather had changed suddenly and completely overnight, and there was a "feel" abroad that seemed to portend some drastic natural event. The sky was covered by a rayless plaster of clouds the colour of modelers' clay; there was no wind, and the trees on the river bank stood motionless in an ominous hush.

These phenomena drew Bream's mind sharply from the thoughts that haunted him and centred it on the details of the day's journey. He called Eloise's attention to conditions and found that she was not insensible to their influence.

"I feel in my bones that something is going to happen," she told him.

"And so do the dogs from the way they act," he replied, having for some time watched the restive uneasiness of the animals. "I don't believe we had better try the river to-day," he added presently. "The current beneath is swift and I am not going to take any chances with the ice. Woods work is slower but it's safer."

"I think it is best," she agreed.

While they were packing up they said little. His manner to her was subdued, anxious, for her unchanged demeanour told him that she had arrived at no decision overnight. He dreaded that day as he had dreaded nothing in his whole life.

Their prescience regarding the ominous preparation of the invisible forces of Nature was further borne out by the dogs when the start was made. Instead of leaping with their usual eagerness to the work they whined and hung back, sniffing the air suspiciously. But once they were forced to start they went with almost an excess of energy, as if they sought to meet what they could not avoid.

For two hours they travelled without incident. Then, about ten o'clock, Bream became conscious of a sudden darkening of the already gloomy sky and, looking up, saw the northwest smuttled over with a mass of dirty, low-hanging clouds that advanced rapidly.

"There it comes . . . snow!" he cried to Eloise as a single breath-taking puff of wind almost halted him in his tracks. "Climb on the sledge. We'll have to run for it."

No sooner had she taken her seat than the whip whistled among the dogs and they were off on the run, apparently sensible by instinct of the need for haste.

The sledge was now travelling across an area of frozen, swampy ground in which occasional jack-pines furnished the only possible protection from the storm. A quarter of a mile away was a timber line and it was the shelter beyond this that Bream sought.

With almost inconceivable rapidity the smudge of

snow clouds mounted the sky, driving before it tattered shreds of wind cloud that writhed and churned ceaselessly. Even as the racing dogs reached the edge of the woods the zenith was a seething mass of these, and the violent storm gusts were clutching at Bream's garments with lustful fingers.

Once inside the forest the fury of the wind was broken, but Bream did not stop. A little farther on he saw a knoll topped by an intertwined growth of spruce and hazel thickets, and towards this he urged the dogs, shouting hoarsely against the mounting diapason of the wind.

As he drew up in the lee of the knoll the first uninterrupted blast of the storm itself smote them, combining in its blow the force of a mighty mass and the keenness of a knife-blade. But the snow was not yet.

"Lively!" yelled Bream. "Unroll the tent while I unharness the dogs."

But Eloise needed no prompting. She was running beside the sledge tugging at the lashings before it had halted.

It was but the work of a minute to release the dogs and this done Bream turned to help her. The animals, once they were free, immediately set about digging their nests. But only for a moment. As Chinoki, the leader, sought a sheltered spot, he all but bowled over a big snow-shoe rabbit which, true to its nature, had been imitating a snow-covered stump at the approach of danger. With a snort of mingled fright and eagerness the husky leaped out after it as it bounded away, and in an instant the remaining dogs were in full cry, their chronic state of semi-starvation outweighing their fear of the storm.

Bream and the girl in their desperate haste were

oblivious of the incident, their only concern being their preparation to meet the first furious onslaught. Together they raised the tent that seemed now such pitiful shelter, securing it with the usual ropes and pegs.

Then as Bream stood up for a moment he saw the deadly coming of the snow. It rode on the wings of the wind itself, a blank wall of whirling white that blotted from view as it passed, trees, bushes, earth and sky. In an instant it was upon them, and so dense were the flakes that, though almost within hand's reach of the tent, he could barely distinguish its outline.

Recovering his bearings he leaped to the remaining work. One after another he lifted the heavy articles from the sledge and fought his way with them to the tent that now rocked and bellied in the gale. Here, at various points along the flapping edge, he dropped them as ballast, trusting to the snow to do the rest.

Seeing Eloise safely inside he commanded her to remain there and continued his labours, panting and sweating, against the fury of the strangling wind. The dense mass of snowflakes beat upon his face and, melting, left it wet, red, and shiny. Water ran down his neck and seemed to seep through every vulnerable crevice of his fur armour. His final effort was to ballast the rear of the tent with the sledge itself which he dragged into position by main strength.

When, after resting a moment, he was hustled to the front again, the fragile shelter and Eloise were all that remained of his world, for the familiar, friendly forest had been obliterated as if by the smearing stroke of some great mitten.

The problem of his own comfort did not trouble him. Wrapped in his sleeping robes and lying beneath a deepening blanket of snow, he could find as much snug warmth as any curled-up husky.

Having previously piled his sleeping bag and blankets at the door of the tent, he now stooped down to gather them up when he heard her voice, faint above the noise of the wind.

"Dick! Dick! Where are you?" Then, as his form appeared kneeling before the open flap: "Oh, . . . I thought you were lost! You frightened me for a moment."

"Sorry," he shouted back. "I'm all right. You comfortable?"

She drew nearer the opening.

"Yes, thanks. The tent will hold now, I think. We didn't any more than just make it, did we?"

"That's all."

He was fumbling with his sleeping things and attempting to shake them out with a view to quick and convenient use. She watched him silently for a moment, a surmise taking shape in her mind.

"What are you going to do with those?" she challenged.

"Going to roll up in them out here. I'll be all right and I'll keep an eye on you."

"What?" she cried. "Stay out in this storm? Look here, you mustn't do that, Dick. It's worse than you think out there."

"It's nothing," he returned. "The snow will be as warm for me as for the dogs." He lifted the blankets and furs and let them flap and rattle in the wind.

She looked at him for an instant and imagined she

understood. Naturally, she thought, he could hardly *demand* her hospitality!

"But listen," she protested. "Really, your staying out is unnecessary. This wind is terrible. It will numb you before you know it. I——"

She stopped abruptly and then with an impulsive movement flung wider the open flap of the tent.

"Come in here," she offered frankly. "You mustn't stay outside. There's plenty of room for us both."

Watching, she saw him become still as if seized by a sudden thought. Then he turned his head away and she heard indistinctly his voice grown suddenly gruff:

"No. I'll be all right along this bank somewhere. This storm won't last forever. . . . I'll be all right."

"Dick!" she cried. "Listen to reason! Be sensible and get under cover."

He was re-rolling the bed robes now and did not look at her.

"No," he repeated doggedly in his gruff tone, and then with more emphasis: "*No!*"

Suddenly her consciousness seemed to ring a note of warning in her brain as if there was something she had not sensed behind his stubborn refusal. But just as she was aware of this feeling the storm swept her mind to a totally different emotion.

From somewhere deep in the forest there came the roar of wind that gathered strength and voice and destructive power in a mighty *crescendo* as it raged towards them. The next instant it swooped down and tore and wrenched at the straining tent until Eloise expected to see the frail shelter collapse upon her.

Then the fear of destruction, of the brutal fury of unleashed forces, gripped her suddenly, as it does all

puny humans at times, and with an exclamation of fear she clutched his arm, clinging to him.

"Dick!" she cried, "don't go away! Oh, don't go! Don't leave me alone in this storm. Stay with me. I'm so afraid."

For an instant he sat motionless as the wind lessened, and she could feel him quivering beneath her touch. Then he turned to her, his face livid, his eyes burning like those of some tortured creature.

"And *I* am afraid!" he said, his voice strangely thin and high and unnatural. "Afraid to stay! And I won't stay. Do you understand? I won't stay!"

For a moment he seemed to be strangling for he tore at the throat of his parka. Then he got to his feet weakly, one hand stretched gropingly before him, and walked like a man in a dream, into the fury of wind and snow, his blankets trailing forgotten behind him. Almost instantly he had disappeared in the white smother.

Then, in a flash of divination, she understood this half-madness—realised the temptation her pleading had been to him—and she shrank back wide-eyed at the naked revelation. A swift agony of contrition swept her that his suffering should have come through her, and crying his name wildly she started up as if to rush after him. But her voice was torn to shreds at the tent door, and ere she could crawl outside she realised the rashness of her impulse when his every footprint was obliterated as soon as he made it. Conscious of her helplessness she sank down, the prey of a strange, new guilt.

Gone now was her terror of the storm, for more real terrors had taken its place. The wind beat and the

snow lashed her as she sat huddled there, the tent creaked and snapped above her, but she did not feel or hear them. Her mind was with the distracted man who had reeled away from her, for the old, unending struggle that the run for shelter had submerged temporarily, had returned to her, bringing with it a sensation of almost physical nausea.

Where was this going to end? she asked herself in violent agitation. His had been the face of one desperate. To what was she unconsciously driving him? Her impotence to relieve the situation or allay his suffering maddened her. With bleeding heart she saw him breaking and yet she could not cry: "Come, my beloved, let us take our love."

She could not, she *could* not, because, stronger than that impulse, was her desire for his ultimate happiness, something quite impossible to realise should a shadow of self-reproach hang over their union.

A gust of wind drove the stinging, icy snowflakes into her face, and almost without volition she moved back inside the tent and wrapped herself in her stiffening robes.

"I want him, I want his love, but oh, I cannot take it!" her cry rose up. "I've had no answer, no answer! Oh, what is he doing now? What may he do if I cannot give myself?"

Her heart contracted with fear for, during these last three days, she had become aware of the tremendous agitation that never ceased beneath his valiantly controlled emotional surface, and had vaguely glimpsed monstrous possibilities there for his hurt or destruction. What they were, whether they predicated violence of mind or body, she did not know, would not think, but the fearful fact of their existence never left her,

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and seemed to hold up at her a skeleton finger of warning and reproach.

Had these dynamic destructive forces been loosed now? Had she asked too much of him, although it had been no more than she had asked of herself? Was she to be held responsible for him, too, just as she still felt that she was partially responsible for Allan's death?

The cruel injustice of her position became a poignant misery, and with her hands pressed hard against her face she sobbed piteously. The very thought of Allan lashed her like a whip for it thrust before her again the crux of her undecided three-day struggle. And suddenly everything in her future seemed interdependent, deadlocked, closed round her in an invisible mesh from which there was no escape.

She grew desperate. She lost all coherence of thought. Like a snared animal her mind darted here and there seeking escape. She moaned aloud in her agony but her voice was drowned in the roaring of the wind and the eerie clicking noise of the snowflakes that sounded against the tent like myriad, tapping fingers.

"Oh, God, *give* me an answer!" she implored abandonedly. "I must know *now*. This can't go on any longer. I have tried all my life and he has tried . . . oh, we have both been true so long! . . . Is there nothing for us? Is there no way out in honour and peace? Is it a lie that right finds its reward and wrong its punishment? Are these things all lies to which I have given my life and he has given his? If they are, oh, God, let me know it now and end this wretched striving after dreams and unrealities!"

Black chaos of the mind and spirit descended upon her and Faith tottered on its pedestal. Contempla-

tion, patient search for the lighted way, had availed her nothing, and now she threw them aside. Her soul became one great insistent voice clamouring to the supreme Intelligence of which she was so feeble a part, for the justification of its being. Like Poe's prisoner, she beat frantically against the iron walls that closed upon her and left no alternative between liberty and the annihilation of the pit.

But God was not in the fire of her demand nor in the whirlwind of her passion; and presently, as if her vital forces had ebbed low, she was borne away exhausted upon a tide of blackness, one last desperate cry launching from her into the void. And silence descended. . . .

The storm lulled, its first fury spent. Near-by trees, garbed in delicate lace and enveloped in whirling snow veils, appeared like brides ready to tread the runners of spotless new carpet, that had been laid along the cathedral aisles of the forest. No longer were the flakes whipped and driven; they came eddying and dancing like a flight of attendant butterflies. . . .

And everywhere was stillness, the brooding, thinking stillness of wild places.

Long the girl sat, her body relaxed, her mind numbed, inactive. Yet all the while her spirit plunged deep and deeper into the soul-silence within her—that silence which was one with the stillness of Nature.

And suddenly she felt calmed and strengthened, and a great peace fell upon her. Her broken spirit was bathed in infinite gentleness. She was borne for a moment in the arms of divine compassion.

Then, out of the unfathomable deeps with which she had unconsciously linked herself, convincing and unmistakable, came the answer which she had sought so

long. It came in words as startlingly clear as if a human voice had spoken them, and yet she knew that they were not hers, that some agency outside herself inspired them.

"You are not responsible for Allan's death!" it seemed to say. . . . "His life was his own to take up or to lay down. . . . He was working out his own salvation and you were but an instrument in that working out . . . one of many. His sacrifice was needed that the balance might be made good—that his soul might be clean and free. . . . He has passed to a wider view, a deeper knowledge. Let Allan go. Stand up. Slough off the past like an old garment. Live your life. Bring it to fulfilment . . . for Peace is your right and Love your inheritance. . . ."

The words ceased to come. Again the silence within and without.

Eloise slowly lifted her head, and there was that in her face which seemed to light the little tent with an unearthly radiance—the incandescence of sublime, unshakable faith.

"*I know!*" she murmured, her lips parted in a glad smile, her eyes fixed upon some glowing inner vision. "*I know at last!*"

Doubt was gone now, and with it questioning and seeking. Her part was clear to her, her path defined. She experienced a feeling of lightness and resiliency that presently became an unreasoning eagerness. Then suddenly there surged up in her a joy so overmastering that she flung wide her arms and drew a deep, ecstatic breath.

She was free! She loved, oh how she loved! And she was beloved by the prince of men! No need now to dread the words that seemed always on his lips,

no need now to twist and turn and evade and forbid. She could wait in peace to hear those tumbling, feverish words. But oh, let him not keep her waiting too long!

She pulled aside the tent flap and rose to her knees.

The storm was almost over and already one could see long distances through the thinning snow. It was a black and white smothered world but, as she looked out upon it, still caught in the first, sweet joy of her realisation, it seemed the most beautiful world she had ever seen. She wanted to call aloud to it her joy, to clasp it to her heart.

She crawled outside the tent and stood up. The little shelter was snow ballasted and steady as a rock. Behind it rose sharply the outline of the knoll with its half-buried thickets and laden trees. Before was the little stretch of timber that led to the swampy section across which they had raced for cover; in the other directions the forest.

Immediately at hand were familiar objects; round, snowy lumps holding down the tent edge and, behind, one runner of the sledge projecting into the air. Four of the dogs moved sniffing about near-by. The other two were, she supposed, still asleep in their holes under the snow. . . .

She wondered a little why she did not see Dick. He had said he could be comfortable somewhere along the bank, and she had rather hoped to see his huddled shape when she looked about her. The question as to why he had not returned to the tent when the storm commenced to abate suggested itself, but she dismissed it with the thought that perhaps he had fallen asleep or was delaying for some other reason. Nevertheless

she scrutinised carefully the whole windward side of the knoll for some mound that might conceal him.

Then reason told her that, though it had stormed furiously, yet the snow could hardly have covered him completely in this sheltered spot. She looked at her watch. Half-past eleven, an hour and a half since they first had noticed the approach of the storm. She shook her head yet walked along the foot of the knoll to reassure herself.

"Dick, oh Dick!" she called. "Halloo! Halloo!"

Perhaps he had sought shelter in some still more protected place, she encouraged herself; but reason immediately asked how he could have found such a spot in the storm that was raging when he left her. A faint shock of uneasiness registered and passed. . . .

She made a trumpet of her hands and sent her long, sustained "Halloo!" in every direction, listening intently after its echoes had died away. For answer a whiskey-jack scolded from the tip of a spruce and a pert squirrel jeered: The forest folk were commencing to reappear and resume their interrupted occupations.

When fifteen minutes had passed without human answer to her calls, she confessed herself at a loss to understand and her uneasiness returned. The vernal joy of her heart was chilled and subdued like a too early flower. . . .

Presently after several indecisive beginnings she strapped on her snow-shoes to try and look for him. She did not dare go far, for she knew that as soon as her back was turned the half-starved huskies would be at the provision bags. Keeping the camp in sight she walked first in one direction then in another, hallooing continuously.

Where could he be? It was not like him to go away and stay like this, especially when they had already lost two hours out of their day.

She recalled the circumstances of his going, his ghastly face, his unnatural voice, the terrible strain under which he had been labouring. Then she felt stirring in her a vague connection with the past, and suddenly she stopped as if stricken. Her mind had leaped back to that night when he had so suddenly left the B. & M. camp. She knew now from the message in his eyes what had driven him forth then, and a fear so sickening that it drowned all her previous fears swept over her. Had that happened again? Had he, strained beyond endurance, beyond reason, cast everything to the winds and rushed away?

She pressed her hands spasmodically against her heart to control its wild beating, and her breath came slowly, labouredly. Could it be, she cried, this unthinkable thing—now—*now* when the long struggle was over, when all of life awaited him here for the taking?

Her thought reverted dully to the crisis through which she had just passed, from which she had emerged dowered with heaven. Was this to be the end—the gift of their love snatched away at the moment of its giving?

It was the supreme crisis. Then, standing there alone, one tiny human spark in the midst of endless, snowy desolation, she garnered the full fruit of that cry she had launched so despairingly into the void. The Faith that had wavered stood firm, belief took the place of question.

"The path for us has been made clear," she cried with glad certainty, "and upon it he will come to me."

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Wherever he is, he will know and he will come. Our desire *must* bring its own fulfilment. We have kept the law and we have waited so long. I know, I *know* that this cannot be taken from us. I thank thee, O God, for this love that thou hast given me."

Strong, revitalised, lifted out of herself by her unshakable knowledge, she stood as upon a mountain peak, her face to the glad morning that she knew must dawn.

And even as she looked she saw him come. Around the knoll he came, Chinoki trotting before him with tinkling bell. He was carrying something in his arms which she recognised a moment later as another of the huskies. His face was bent above the animal and she saw that he was talking to it gently.

Radiant, eager, she moved towards him drinking in the vision, her eyes like stars, her lips parted.

"Dick!" she cried, her soul in her voice, "Dick!"

"Ah," he said with quick concern, "I hope you weren't anxious because I was gone so long. The dogs must have been hunting or something for this chap got his foot in an otter trap. Chinoki dug me out of the snow and led me—why, Eloise—what—what——"

He stopped short for he had seen the light of glory on her face. She heard the swift intake of his breath, and then he laid the whining husky gently on the snow.

"I might have guessed," she breathed. "When have you not sought out the hurt and the miserable and brought them home? Oh, my splendid lover!"

"Eloise!"

His voice was a great cry that held in its one note the surcease from an eternity of pain. For a moment he stood as one who, waking, suspects a dream. Then,

reading the message in her starry eyes, the effulgence that beat upon her face commenced to shine upon his, and he slowly opened his arms.

"My dear, oh my dearest," she sobbed and ran to him. "Take me, Dick! Oh, hold me close. I need you, oh, I need you!"

With an incoherent cry he swept her to him, and as their lips met, their souls, so long alone, rushed together into celestial perfect union.

CHAPTER XXIX

AND THEY ALL LIVED—

THAT storm broke the back of winter, and the next morning when they reluctantly left the enchanted spot that had once upon a time been their camp, the air was warm and laden with exhilarating odours that had crept up from the South overnight.

"Spring is here at last, beloved," said Eloise lifting her face to the touch of the soft south breeze as they sat at breakfast. "Winter will go quickly now."

"It is gone already from my heart," he returned. "Even the memory of it is very dim. There can be nothing but Summer now forever and ever."

She laughed a little, low laugh of happiness, and rested fond eyes upon him—loving the proud carriage of his head with its gently curling hair, his eager face, and sparkling eyes. He was so boyish, so unspoiled, so glorified.

"Yes . . . Summer forever and ever," she said, and waited ecstatic for the flame of his kiss.

He was like one who, from a crest, sees his promised land and finds it lovelier than his wildest dreams. She came, magically, to have in his eyes the attributes of those two women in whose double likeness she seemed moulded—Beatrice and Héloïse—the infinitely worshipped and the infinitely desired. Every movement of her was poetry, every word music. The

touch of their fingers about the tin cup when she passed his tea brought at once a benediction and a thrill. Overpowered by exaltation he marvelled at her serene beauty, her courage, her unfailing sweetness. The sight of a wilful tendril of her hair curling out of her parka was enough to snare his heart in a silken net and hold it for hours stupefied, adoring. . . .

Somehow they broke the spell and resumed their journey, radiant lovers of the untracked road, Gypsies of the wild. And, though the snow grew soft and held them back, there was no hardship on that journey, for it led across Arcadia; neither was there weariness nor anything that seemed of earth.

Halcyon days those were—wondrous days, all enchantment, ravishment, transport, when every task was veiled in a golden mist and every weariness vanished at the touch of life.

The land commenced to awaken before their very eyes as if in honour of their passing; laurel and hazel, willow and cottonwood buds swelled, purple and green and brown. The moss upon the trees and earth where the snow was scraped away commenced to show fresh and vivid; grasses and great ferns and thousands of wild flowers stirred in their sleep, feeling the new pulse of mounting life.

Upon the sap-swollen trees woodland choirs chanted ceaselessly the Prothalamium of the dreaming pair. Jays, robins, king-birds, warblers, oven birds, finches, wrens, thrushes,—all the feathered life that had appeared as if by magic at the first true budding of spring, trilled and sang its mating song to these who, too, would mate at last in a nest of their own.

The sun was kind but not too fervent, the winds were soft with an edge of iciness that held the snow,

there was everywhere a consciousness of indestructible life leaping up after its long sleep, like a young man to run a race. And these two who had sought so long looked upon the earth and found it good. Pain, which is only pleasure gnarled and twisted by maladjustment, was gone. The universe and its infinite benediction was theirs, the world of men seeming a storied land peopled by futile creatures who rent each other with evil and hatred and all uncharitableness.

And the future was as certain as the present for, where the cosmic law is known and lived to its last bright letter, there can be naught but success and joy and love and service.

THE END

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